Stay With Me by buttsbeyondbutts

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Genre: Abusive Myra Kaspbrak, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Angst, Angst with a Happy Ending, Assault, Blow Jobs, Canon-Typical Violence, Canonical Character Death, Divorce, Domestic Fluff, Domestic Violence, Emotional Constipation, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Emotional/Psychological Abuse, F/M, Flashbacks, Fluff and Angst, Friendship, Getting Together, Hand Jobs, Hospitals, Love Confessions, M/M, Masturbation, Nightmares, Original Character(s), Past Abuse, Pennywise (IT) is His Own Warning, Pining, Post-Pennywise (IT), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Smut, Tom Rogan gets decked
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Summary:

"Hey, Richie?"

"What?"

"Thanks for staying with me," Eddie waved at the piles of paperwork and surrounding medical equipment. "For all of this."

Richie smiled, blinking hard. "Of course, Eds."

"Seriously, I couldn't do this without you."

Something snapped in Richie. He crossed the room in one long stride, knelt down and grabbed Eddie's hand. His hands were enormous, pressed hot and tight over Eddie's fingers. "Yes, you could." He spoke with such intensity he sounded almost angry. Hot breath pushed onto Eddie's skin with every word he spoke. "You could do this without anyone."

"Okay, but you make it better."

1. Richie Tozier Waits

Richie couldn't remember the last time he'd been in a hospital. He had his tonsils out when he was seventeen, a couple stomach pumps in his early drinking days, and a couple more in his later drinking days. He remembered waiting for his father to die. Richie was 35, fresh off his second album taping. He waited in a sterile ass room just like this one for the beeping to become steady and unbroken.

Beep Beep, Richie.

This was somehow worse. Not just because he was 40 and his entire body hurt all the time. Not just because he was covered in sweat, dirt, evil clown debris and blood (*Eddie's blood*). Not even because it was Eddie Kasbrak, first and only love of his life, breathing through a machine in Intensive Care though that was most of it.

No, what made this moment, and every moment of the passed 72 hours, the worst moment of Richie's life was time. Approximately 27 years.

Richie had time with his parents. For all the secrets he kept and the shame he caused, Richie knew his parents loved him. They knew he loved them.

Eddie didn't.

Eddie lay half way to death, not knowing that he was the most important person in the world. Richie never told him. Because of whatever space magic ran Derry and the deadlights, Richie didn't even remember Eddie. Now 27 years had passed and Richie didn't know where Eddie lived, what he listened to on the radio or where

he went to college.

Richie hadn't even realized Eddie was married.

Richie pushed his fingers through his filthy, filthy hair and swore. 27 fucking years. Over half of his life with seven loser shaped holes in his heart. One would be there forever. They wouldn't even attend Stan's funeral. Richie couldn't stand the thought of attending Eddie's.

A strong hand gripped his shoulder. "Hey," Mike said, "You okay?"

Richie looked at Mike, then back to the double doors Eddie had disappeared behind. " 'm fine."

"Yeah. You wanna head back to Town House and get a shower in?"

Richie was silent.

"Richie," Bev squeezed his hand. When did she get back? "You need to get cleaned up, hon."

"I'm good."

"Rich," Mike pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Look, if you guys want to drag me out of here, you're welcome to try, but I'm not leaving without Eddie." He'd said basically the same thing under Neibolt.

"He could be here for days."

Richie shrugged. He wasn't leaving Eddie again.

"Ben, Bill, and I will stay with him," Bev promised. "Let Mike take you to the hotel. We'll call you if anything happens."

"It's a fifteen minute drive," Mike said. "That's nothing."

Richie snorted. Fifteen minutes, thirty round trip, was a goddamn lifetime. It only took a second for that shit to punch through Eddie like he was a fucking juice box.

You still have his blood on your face, Trashmouth.

"I'm not going."

Mike swore under his breath. Bev squeezed his hand again.

"Mr. Tozier?" An nervous intern in clean blue scrubs approached.

Adrenaline surged through him. "What? How's Eddie?"

She cleared her throat. "I don't- they're still working on him."

Richie slouched back down. The young doctor toyed with her rainbow lanyard. "There's a locker room for the doctors, if you want-" she glanced over her shoulder.

Mike looked at Richie hopefully. Richie inhaled. He should probably wash Eddie's blood off at some point. "Fine."

He let the intern guide him to the Doctor's Locker room while Mike rushed back to the hotel to grab him a change of clothes.

"There's towels and soap dispensers in there." She said.

"Thanks."

"You're not really supposed to be in there but it should be okay. I'll keep watch."

"Thanks." He said and went inside.

The locker room was a locker room. Richie didn't know what he was expecting. He might as well have been back in high school, except he never fucking showered in high school locker rooms. Only jocks ever got sweaty enough to warrant it and Richie knew a lot better than to shove himself into that kind of temptation.

He turned on the water and listened. No whispers rose over the stream. No invitations to play or to float. The clown was well and truly dead.

Thought It was dead last time. Richie shrugged off his clothes and stepped into the stream. *Or we wanted it bad enough to convince ourselves.*

No. We crushed It's heart. Watched it crumbled and disappeared.

Watched a lot of things.

Watched Eddie get skewered. Watched him cough blood on my face. Watched his organs spill out. Watched him die.

Richie braced himself against the wall, fighting back the vomit. He lost.

"Wasn't real." He sunk down on the blue tile, sobbing. "Not real. Didn't happen. Just the deadlights."

He'd moved when it counted. When it was really Eddie in front of him, elated by his own bravery, Richie had moved. He pushed Eddie away for the last time, not fast enough.

Richie threw up again. He watched the coffee and stomach bile circle around the drain. There was nothing else in him.

The clown hit Eddie's side, tearing through flesh like paper. Richie could see his organs but Eddie looked at him. Eddie looked at him for comfort and Richie didn't have any.

I made him small. Eddie said.

Bev figured it out. The other losers bullied It to destruction while Richie tried to keep Eddie conscious.

"Richie..."

"Yeah. Yeah, Buddy, what's up?"

"I fucked your mom."

Those were Eddie's last words before he passed out. Richie, characteristically, kept talking.

"Eddie! Eds, please, you gotta stay awake! C'mon, man, stay with me! Eddie!"

But Eddie didn't move. Richie watched blood and mud circle the

locker drain. It disappeared, flowing down into Derry's now ordinary sewer. Nothing but piss and shit and bodies down there.

"Richie? You okay in there?"

He didn't answer. Bill called again. Richie just watched the water in the drain. No, he was not okay in there. Maybe he had never been okay in his entire life. He'd certainly never be okay again.

"Richie!" *When the hell did Bill get here?*

He crouched in front of Richie, water soaking through his clothes. His mouth went up and down but Richie couldn't understand what that meant. Something about breathing?

I need to breathe? No shit, Sherlock. Obviously I-

Oh fuck I'm not breathing.

Bill looked slightly relieved when Richie inhaled. In for two. Out for one. In for three. Out for two. In for four, so on and so forth.

"I'm good." Richie grunted. "I'm good."

"Are you?" His stutter was basically gone. "You've been in here for 20 minutes."

"Shit." That explained why he was freezing. "Any news?"

Bill shook his head. He reached up and turned off the water. Richie shivered. He braced himself against Bill, feeling like he might bash his head in at any moment. Get a bed next to Eddie.

Bill led him to a wooden bench with a towel on it. He watched as Richie dried himself. "You sure you're good?" He asked again. "We could get a doctor."

Richie shook his head. "This is as good as I'm gonna get, Billiam."

Bill made a sound, half laugh and half sigh. He leaned back on the lockers and closed his eyes, looking a good ten years older.

"Hey!" Mike poked his head through the door. "Got you some clothes, man."

He handed him a pair of faded jeans, a Ghostbusters t-shirt, sandwiching boxers. By some cosmic Loser witchcraft, he'd managed to pick Richie's favorite clothes. All except his jacket. Richie didn't know what happened to his jacket after Eddie went to the ICU.

"Thanks, Mike." Richie said. He pulled the t-shirt over his head and shook himself like a dog. A couple more zips and shakes and they were back in the lobby. Richie sat down next to Bev. She put her arm around his shoulder. Richie leaned back on her with a small sigh. He did feel better without all the blood and visera. Now he could wait again.

The losers came and went in shifts. Richie was never actually alone. Bev and Ben return to the hotel around ten that night. Bill fell asleep on Richie's shoulder while Mike talked to the police. Richie didn't know what he told them about Bowers' rotting corpse in the library. Nobody asked for his opinion.

Killing Bowers should've probably affected him more. Or at all. So much had happened between the library and the hospital, Richie barely remembered it. It should probably concern him that taking a human life, however homicidal and batshit that life had been, made such a small impression.

It didn't. Beyond the idle hope that Mike didn't catch any shit for it, the murder hardly crossed his mind. More likely Richie would end up in jail for assaulting whatever cop tried to take him away from Eddie.

Around six in the morning, the intern with the Pride lanyard appeared in front of him. "Mr. Tozier? Mr. Kasbrak is out of surgery."

Richie stood up, letting Mike fall awake. "Is he okay?"

She swallowed. "He's stable but we have to keep him under close supervision. His internal organs are heavily damaged. It's a miracle you got him here in time."

Richie had never been so grateful for Bill and Mike. If they hadn't been gripping his shoulders, he'd have collapsed. "Can we see him?"

"Visiting hours start at nine," she said. He could tell the shower was a one time favor. Whatever pity he inspired, she would not help him visit Eddie early. "You can probably go get some rest."

"No." Richie sat down again.

"Thank you, Dr. Zhao." Mike said, shaking her hand. "We really appreciate it."

She nodded. "Does Mr. Kaspbrak have any family? We didn't find a phone or wallet."

Bill looked at Mike. "There's a wife, right? Maya?"

"Myra," Mike said, but he didn't sound very sure of himself. "Yeah, I should have her number. Let me check."

Mike scrolled through his contacts. Dr. Zhao looked at Richie with new apprehension. Richie stared right back.

Zhao broke first. "If you get a hold of her, fill out this form, please... and ask her to come in." She handed a blank insurance form to Bill.

"Two to one odds, he's got a copy in his suitcase." Richie said. "One for each suitcase."

"M-makes sense to me," Bill said, running fingers through his hair.

"If you bring the insurance information, it'll help a lot." Zhao said. "We'll let you know if there's any changes."

"Th-thank you," Bill said. He sat down next to Richie. "Thank Christ."

Richie shrugged. "What's up with your stutter, man?"

"St-stress." Bill said. "Acts up when I stay up too long."

"You guys go get some sleep. I'll be fine."

Mike and Bill glanced at each other with raised eyebrows. Richie

blinked slowly and inhaled. "Relax, I'm not going to do anything stupid."

They had the nerve to snort at that. Mike paced around the waiting room, searching for Maya/Myra. Richie didn't spare much thought to the unseen wife. If he didn't feel guilt about axing a guy, he definitely wasn't bothered by Eddie's marriage.

Richie's friends underestimated him. Bill went to the bathroom a couple minutes before Mike found Eddie's home phone number. Apparently good old Mike Hanlon was one of those people who had to walk around while he talked on the phone. He wandered into the hallway, leaving one Richard TM Tozier without any adult supervision.

Richie dropped to all fours and headed for the double doors. The lady at the front desk had been engrossed in her phone for the last hour but he didn't want to risk getting caught.

Once inside, he stood up and strode toward the notice board. Confidence opened a lot of doors in comedy, especially literal doors. It didn't hurt that the place was mostly deserted. Richie found Eddie's name and hurried to the number attatched. No one questioned him.

He had tubes in his nose and throat. There were more, probably, that Richie couldn't see. Eddie looked incredibly small, laid out on the hospital bed. Someone had given him a bath and replaced the bandage on his cheek. The wound on his abdomen was covered with clean bandages.

"Hey, Eds," Richie cleared his throat. "Are you- fuck."

He walked to the head of the bed, where Eddie was plugged into a half dozen machines. *Beep. Beep, Richie. Beep. Beep. Beep.*

He brushed his fingers carefully over Eddie's forehead. "Hey, Eddie. You were right. We killed the clown. You can- fuck! You can get up any time now."

He slide down to the floor, hands in his hair. "I don't know why I came in here, man. I don't know if you can hear me or what. You

fucking know, don't you? Care to fill me in?"

Eddie said nothing.

"They said you were stable anyway. Which is fucking weird because you have never been stable in your fucking life." Richie chuckled, letting the tears fall down his cheeks. "You ever thought about weed, Eddie? Just to chill out for thirty minutes? Mike'll hook you up."

Beep beep beep.

"The losers are fine, by the way. I mean... traumatized obviously but breathing, thanks to you. Bev and Ben are joined up at the hip now so expect new and beautiful children, I guess. Mike and Bill make pretty shitty babysitters since I'm sitting here."

Richie sighed. "Mike's calling your wife... they wanna make sure she's real. Look, if you wake up right now I'll- I'll do whatever you want. I don't care. Anything. Money, drugs, whatever you want." Richie sighed. "No time limit. Rest of my life, Eddie. Anything you want but you have to wake up right now. Okay?"

Eddie didn't move.

"Now."

Eddie said nothing.

"Onetwothreenow!"

Beep beep beep.

"Okay, call my bluff." Richie said. "Whatever you want, I'll do it. Just wake up for me, okay? If you don't, I'll- I'll make them put Eddie Spaghetti in your obituary."

He waited for the obligatory complaint against his least favorite nickname. Nothing came. Eddie lay just as still as ever, shut down worse than when his mother screamed at him or even when the clown attacked.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

"Must be out of my fucking mind, Eddie." Richie wiped back his tears. His ass was falling asleep on the linoleum. He thought about rolling over and laying under Eddie's bed like a dog. Just to stay near him, as he would have done in Neibolt had the losers not gotten them both out. The world crumbled around them and he just wanted to stay with Eddie.

"I love you." Richie whispered. "Sorry, I couldn't say it before but-fuck, Eds, I was scared. I'm still scared but I love you more. If you wake up, I'll tell you for real. I love Eddie Kasbrak. As much as you want."

He stood again and brushed his fingers over Eddie's forehead. There were too many bandages and wires to risk touching anywhere else. Richie thought about all the cartoon fairy tales of his childhood, where True Love's Kiss (tm) could heal any ill. It worked when Beverly got caught in the deadlights.

Richie dismissed it. Gut wounds and heavy anesthesia, unlike cosmic clown monsters, didn't care if you really believed. Besides, Eddie should be awake for their first kiss.

Richie raised his fingers to his lips and then back on Eddie's forehead. "Look, I gotta go before Bill calls in the coast guard. I'll see you in a couple hours, bud."

He didn't move. Neither did Eddie, beyond the mechanical rise and fall of his chest. Richie would have caught it if he had. He watched Eddie breathe, memorizing every inch of his face.

Fuck Derry. Fuck space magic and fuck that stupid clown. I'm not forgetting again.

Then somebody opened a door somewhere and Richie booked it before he could get yelled at.

Bill had coffee for him in the waiting room. Richie wished he'd brought some whiskey.

"You said you weren't going to do anything stupid."

"Everything I do is a model of dignity and decorum." Richie sipped his coffee.

"How's Eddie?"

Richie shrugged. "Asleep. They got him cleaned up, lotta bandages, lotta tubes. The beeps sound right."

"Good." Bill said. He leaned back in his chair and winced at the lights. "Kind of a miracle no one else ended up here. Or worse."

"I don't what kinda God you're into but I got some notes in the miracle department."

Bill chuckled and wiped his eyes. Mike returned, slipping his phone back into his pocket.

"Did you get her?" It took Richie a minute to realize they were talking about Eddie's wife.

Mike shook his head. "Left a couple messages. I'll try again later."

They sat in silence until Bev and Ben showed up. Seeing Eddie must have cheered Richie up since he found the strength to be annoyed with them. Who looked that good after battling a cosmic murder clown? On his best day, Richie looked like a morlock compared to Handsome Ben Hanscom. Bev, make up free with bags under her eyes, could give Jessica Chastain a run for her money. They even had the nerve to walk in holding hands. Thank fuck they brought bagels or Richie would hate them forever.

"Any change?" Ben asked as he hugged Richie.

"Not yet." Richie sighed. "Your fucking arms, Haystack, what the fuck?"

Ben laughed, inner fat kid blushing through chistled adult cheeks.

Bev checked her watch. "It's 8:50. Think they let us in early?"

They didn't. At 9:01, Dr. Zhao, the rainbow intern, informed them that Eddie was in holding steady and they could see him, two at a time. Bill and Richie went first. Zhao helpfully ignored Richie walking ahead of her and plopping into the folding chair closest to Eddie's head like he lived there. He hoped Ben and Bev could untangle themselves for twenty minutes because Richie wasn't moving.

Bill seemed to understand. He didn't try to talk to Richie, just put his hand on his shoulder and squeezed. He didn't comment when Richie took Eddie's hand, just sat quietly. Richie thought he'd never had a better friend than Bill Denbrough.

"I'm gonna go back to the hotel and clean up." Bill said after a long time. "I'll be back soon."

"Thanks," Richie said.

Bill stood and squeezed his shoulder again. "He's gonna be okay, Richie. So are you."

"Thanks." It sounded a little like 'fuck off' but Bill didn't call him on it. Instead he nodded and left Eddie and Richie by themselves.

Mike came in next, looking at his phone. "How is he?"

Richie nodded to Eddie's unconscious form. "Like that."

Mike sat in Bill's chair. "Hey, Eddie."

Eddie continued his silent treatment. Mike rubbed his temples.

"Any word from the wife?" Richie asked.

"I left another message." Mike said. "I didn't know how much to tell her so I just said he had an accident and she should get down here. Maybe she's already on her way."

Richie guessed that made sense. It's what he would do. He knew, intellectually, thar he shouldn't hate Maya/Myra just because she'd married Eddie. He didn't know the first thing about her, besides what he'd gleaned from the cyber stalking he did on every loser. She

looked exactly like Eddie's mother which, while creepy, didn't necessarily make her awful. Eddie married her after all, there must have been something there.

Still, Richie kept holding her husband's hand. Whatever Myra Kaspbrak was, she didn't deserve Eddie. Not that Richie did but if he hadn't been such a coward and said something before they lost each other-

He sighed and squeezed Eddie's hand. *I'm not forgetting again.*

After Mike stretched and declared that he needed to get home before he passed out, Bev came to sit with them. She greeted Eddie with a smile and took Richie's other hand.

"So, you and Ben?" Richie managed a smile.

Beverly nodded. "Me and Ben." Her smile faltered, looking at Eddie's face. "You and Eddie?"

Richie didn't bother asking how she knew. Three days ago, the question would've sent him into an anxiety attack, vomiting up a million recursive jokes and possibly literal vomit. Now keeping his dirty little secret seemed like the least important thing in the world.

"Just me," he said and rubbed his thumb over Eddie's knuckles. "Since we were kids... I saw him again and everything came back."

Bev squeezed his hand. "I know."

Richie huffed a small laugh. "Of course you knew. Guess I wasn't exactly subtle."

"Eddie's not either," she said in a fond voice.

Richie frowned. "Eddie's married." The words left an awful dusty taste in his mouth.

Bev scoffed. "Yeah, I'm married too."

"Seriously?" He turned her hand over in his. No ring, except for the pale patch of skin where in had sat for many years.

"Not for much longer," she said. Bev shook her head, squeezing out a few tears from under her long lashes. When she opened them again, her eyes were fierce. "Look, I'm not saying everything will be amazing if you tell him. We lost almost 30 years. People change."

I didn't. It wasn't quite true. He'd gotten taller and sadder and his back hurt when he fell asleep on the couch. Richie Tozier grew up. Worse still, he grew old but the minute he'd stepped into that Chinese place and saw Eddie Kasbrak again, he was twelve again. He reverted back to that loud mouthed kid who'd say or do anything just to get one specific person to look at him.

Bev continued. "But he deserves to know."

"And if it fucks everything up?"

"It won't," she squeezed his hand like her painfully cliché romance with her equally attractive and heterosexual paramour was a comparable example. "Eddie'd never want to hurt you."

Richie let out a heavy breath. He hated this deep shit. This was exactly why he didn't come out. This was why he didn't write his own material.

This was why the deepest love of his life had married somebody else. Because Bev was right. Eddie would never want to hurt Richie. The universe just didn't care what people wanted, and Eddie could hurt Richie without moving or saying a word.

Change the subject! His coping mechanism screamed. *Talk about anything! Anything but this!"*

"So... you're married?"

Anything else, moron!

Bev nodded. "Unfortunatly. Imagine my dad with money and power."

"Fuck." Richie said.

"Yeah. He probably would have killed me someday."

"Jesus, Bev." She said it with such matter of fact acceptance. Richie felt like he'd been punched in the gut. "I should've been there."

Of course that made her laugh. "You didn't know who I was, Richie. I definitely couldn't have picked you out of a lineup."

Richie chuckled and squeezed her hand. God, he'd missed his friends. Stupid space magic. "Still," he said. "We should've been there. I'm sorry."

"Thanks."

They sat for a moment. Bev leaned on his shoulder. Only the steady beep beep beep of Eddie's machines broke the silence.

"What are you going to do?"

"Get a divorce. It'll be a bitch to split up the assets but..." she shrugged. "I don't need to ever be alone with that man again."

He nodded. He'd watched Bev Marsh stab a demon clown through the skull at thirteen years old. She'd only gotten stronger.

"Well." Richie released her hand and swung his arm over her shoulder. "If you need a buff body gaurd pro bono, I know a guy."

Bev giggled. "Yeah, I think I know that guy too."

"I was talking about me."

She laughed, loud and honest. Richie grinned. They laughed together. Then Bev looked back down at Eddie and swallowed. "I think you're booked, honey."

Richie coughed. He pulled her into a close half hug. "Yeah, I think I am."

Bev hugged him back, pushing her face into his shoulder. "I love you, Rich."

"Love you too, B."

They sat in mostly silence, talking about unimportant things. Bev talked to Eddie, told him that they'd stick around until he woke up. Richie liked the world she lived in, where they just had to wait for Eddie to wake up before everyone fucked off to divorce court and boats with dogs. She seemed so very certain about it, that Richie started to believe too.

Bev tussled his hair on her way out. "I'll send Ben in. See you boys later."

"Thanks, Bev," Richie said for the both of them.

Ben came in quietly. He went to Eddie's other side, after a short greeting, to study the various charts and machines.

"You know about that stuff, Haystack?" Richie asked. If Ben was handsome, rich and a secret doctor, Richie might have to throw himself back into the sewers.

"Kinda?" He turned and smiled bashfully. "I got a little fixated for awhile."

"Well? How's our boy?"

Ben pulled the other chair out and sat down. "You probably know more. You've been here the longest."

Richie rubbed his eyes behind his glasses. "Where else am I gonna go?"

Ben nodded. He took in the scene with the same quiet intensity he operated with as a kid. Eddie, beeping machines, charts neither of them understood, and Richie. He rubbed his eyes and leaned back in the chair. "Fuck." He muttered.

"Amen to that." Richie said.

Ben turned his head without looking up. "I can't believe we're fucking here, man."

"Where are we supposed to be?" Richie echoed himself.

"Dead." He spoke with such blunt conviction, Richie sat up straight.

"What the fuck, Ben?"

He shrugged handsomely. "I just kind of assumed most of us would die down there. Didn't you?"

Kinda? Richie racked his brain for memories from the ancient times of Friday afternoon. Had he considered a world where he never left Neibolt? Not really. He'd decided to stay with his friends. Nothing beyond that decision ever occurred to him.

"If you thought we were gonna die, why the fuck did you go down there?"

He shrugged again. "My friends were going." Like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Richie laughed, feeling sick. "If all your friends jumped off a cliff, would you do it too?"

"Yeah." Ben said. "We literally did that."

"Touché, Haystack." He looked back at Eddie and sighed. Ben was right. He'd have followed his friends into hell, complaining all the time. He had twice already. Because Bev was right too. Richie Tozier was fucking booked.

"Ben?"

"Yeah?"

"Did you actually remember us?

Ben considered it for a moment. He looked down at his hands. "Mostly. I didn't remember the clown. I remembered hanging out with you guys because- well, I'd never really had friends before, and I remembered Bev because-"

"You were in love with her." Richie looked at Eddie. Eddie's chest rose and fell, like and ocean wave. Hadn't Richie loved him enough? He remembered loving Eddie so much he thought it would kill him.

So why did he fade like everyone else?

Ben stood and put his hand on Richie's shoulder.

They stayed like that for a while. Richie held onto Eddie while Ben held onto him.

Then Ben said. "She was the only girl who liked me when I was fat. I think that's what made me remember her. It was different for you guys."

Richie knew what he meant. Not different for Bill or Stan or Mike, but different for Richie and Eddie. Very different for them. Nobody got run out of town for being a fat kid with hope.

"You know what's insane?" Richie said.

"What?"

"You weren't even that fat." Ben laughed. Richie smiled, ignoring the tears in his eyes. "Like compared to kids now? Barely even chubby."

"Thanks, Rich."

"Seriously I'm happy for you guys." Richie said. He took a deep breath, and looked at Ben. "I am."

"Thanks, Richie," Ben blushed a little. "I still can't believe it."

"Yeah, two beautiful people got together," Richie rolled his eyes. "That's the most unbelievable thing that happened this weekend. Get the fuck outta here, Hanscom."

Ben laughed and stood up. "You drink any water today, Rich?"

He probably swallowed some in the shower. "Coffee's got water in it."

Ben rolled his eyes. "I'll bring you some water and a sandwich. Turkey right? Mayonnaise and tomato?"

Exactly right. "You're not one of those healthy people that tries to get everyone to the gym with you right?"

Ben chuckled. He left without another word but lingered at the door, watching them. Richie still held Eddie's hand. He hadn't let go since he got there. 48 hours ago- 50? 72? How long had they been here?- he'd been looking for any excuse to touch him. Stand a little too close so he bumps into you. Punch his shoulder. Challenge him to an arm wrestling match. Anything to be near him. The simple act of taking his hand had seemed as likely as driving to Alpha Centauri.

Now there he was, holding Eddie's hand for hours. He'd been witnessed, by the only people he gave a shit about anymore. They didn't condemn him. They barely even cared.

Richie's dirty secret was out and somehow, the world hadn't ended. The world lay in a hospital bed and Richie held his hand.

Ben left with a smile on his face. Richie took his other hand and cupped Eddie's cheek. "Hey," he whispered. "They're gone. It's just you and me, Eds. If you wanna wake up without everyone staring at you, go ahead.

Eddie didn't move. His cheek was warm.

"Okay." Richie said, "Take your time. I'll be here."

2. Eddie Kaspbrak Wakes Up

Light.

Don't look at the lights.

Eddie squeezed his eyes shut. He floated somewhere out of time and space.

We all float here.

Is this how it feels? Floating? It wasn't actually that bad, aside from the prelude. Maybe Eddie wouldn't have fought so hard if he'd know how calm it was to float.

Gotta ask Bev and Richie.

Can't. You're floating.

Fuck.

He missed Richie and the others. It wouldn't be so bad if he knew they were safe. Eddie didn't know anything, except that he was warm and floaty. Someone held his hand.

Floating had a lot more hand holding than he'd anticipated. He'd always assumed it meant death, the cessation of everything. Eddie wasn't dead though. He knew that. He'd spent his whole life trying to prolong it. His heart still beat. His breath still filled his lungs. Someone held his hand.

Eddie blinked. The lights were heavy but still, not swirling like the ones that grabbed Richie.

Hospital lights. How many times had he stared up at hospital lights? *You're not floating, Eds. You're on pain killers.*

Eddie blinked again. His eyes adjusted. He could see IVs, monitors for his heart and kidneys, a blue blanket over his chest. He found his hand, and the hand holding it. He followed the arm up to the person attached.

Richie.

Richie's okay.

Richie's okay.

He couldn't exactly feel his face but Eddie tried to smile. Richie wasn't facing him. He was talking (*duh)* to someone Eddie couldn't see.

"-fine! I ate and showered! Stop trying to make me leave-"

"Rich-"

"I don't give a shit about-" Richie stopped short. He turned and his voice went quiet. "Eddie?"

Eddie opened his mouth. His throat was too dry to talk. He squeezed Richie's hand.

"Eds," Richie sobbed. "Holy shit, Eddie!"

Hey Trashmouth. Eddie hoped he was smiling. Beyond Richie, he heard someone shouting, people running. Eddie didn't actually care about much beyond Richie. The big baby was still crying. He kept staring at Eddie, like he was scared he'd disappeared. His fingers pushed through Eddie's hair while the others tightened around his hand. Eddie didn't feel like he was floating anymore. Richie's hands and gaze anchored him firmly to the world.

Eddie lasted about a minute and a half before his eyes went heavy and closed again. Richie didn't care. Eddie woke up.

Eddie woke up and squeezed his hand. Eddie woke up and smiled at him.

If he woke up once, he'll do it again

So what if Richie had no real evidence to back that thought up? He didn't have evidence for any of the crazy shit that happened in Derry.

Once Bill confirmed that yes, Eddie had woken up and no, Richie wasn't just hallucinating due to sleep deprivation, the losers were elated. After two days in the ICU, Eddie had been moved to a semi private room. Technically there was another bed but without another patient it became another loser depository. Ben and Bev pushed it against the wall to use as a couch. They sat practically on top of each other, arms over shoulders, fingers intertwined. Mike sat next to them with a big, easy smile while Bill leaned against the door frame. Richie stayed next to Eddie.

The next time Eddie woke up, they were prepared. Bill ran for the doctor and Richie grabbed a cup of ice chips. Four days of IV fluid had left his throat incredibly dry. He let Richie dip the cup into his mouth and held in the chips until they melted.

When he spoke, he spoke to Richie.

"Is It dead?" He sounded like the personification of emphysema but he was talking.

"Yeah," Richie said. He was crying again. He didn't care. "Yeah, Eddie. We killed it."

Eddie nodded. He glanced around the room, blinking heavily. "You guys okay?"

The rest of the losers had gathered around his bed the moment Eddie opened his eyes. Ben and Bev were both crying too much to speakbut Mike grinned.

"We're a lot better now! Welcome back, man."

"Thanks," Eddie smiled. Then what little color he had drained away. "Where's Bill?"

"He's getting the doctor, Eds. Don't worry." Richie patted his hand. "Everything's okay."

"Okay, Richie." He blinked slowly, and blinked again.

Richie sat down and picked up his hand again. "Don't go to sleep yet, Eds. Doc wants to check you out."

"Kay."

"You want some more ice, bud?"

Eddie nodded and winced at the movement. Richie picked up the cup and tipped it carefully into his mouth. They watched Eddie suck on ice chips in absolute silence. He looked like Van Gogh's Sunflowers.

Bill arrived with the doctor in tow. Dr. Zhao's attending was a white man in his sixties with three whisps of silver hair. He looked like a twin or distant cousin of Dr. Keene. Eddie must've seen it too because he frowned and swallowed his ice.

"Mr. Kaspbrak!" Keene 2.0 looked at Eddie's chart rather than Eddie. "You gave your friends quite a scare. How do you feel?"

"I'm okay," Eddie croaked. "Hey, Bill."

"H-hey, Eddie." Bill choked on his own emotions.

"Well, you've suffered a great deal of trauma." The doctor continued. "Perforated right lung, liver and large intestine. Worst I've seen in a long time."

Eddie frowned again. He blinked hard and finally looked down at his injuries. He groaned softly, the beginning of a scream.

"Hey!" Richie put his arm over Eddie's shoulder and squeezed. "Hey, you're gonna be fine! A few stitches, some therapy, that's nothing."

The doctor raised an eyebrow. "He's not out of the woods yet. We'll be monitoring the situation for at least 72 hours before he'd be able to leave. Assuming Mr. Kaspbrak's remains stable, he'll need extensive rehabilitation."

Richie glared at him. "Nice bedside manner, doc. Where'd you get started, Abu Ghraib?"

Doctor Frankenstein grumbled but Richie ignored him. "You'll be okay, Eds. We're right here. We're not going anywhere."

The other losers confirmed immediately. Eddie almost died in front of them. No way was he dealing with the fall out alone.

Eddie looked a little comforted. He held onto Richie's hand with the intensity of a child. He didn't say anything, just held on.

"Dr. Zhao will take your vitals, and we'll monitor the situation." He left without another word and the rainbow intern stepped forward.

"Hi, Mr. Kaspbrak. I'm Dr. Zhao." She smiled at him. "I wish we were meeting under different circumstances."

"Yeah," Eddie croaked. His grip on Richie's hand loosened slightly.

"I'm just going to get a few numbers from you and some samples." She said. "It'll just be a couple minutes. Let me know if you're at all uncomfortable."

Eddie nodded and winced again.

"Try not to move too much, okay?" Richie said.

Another nod. Another wince. Richie fought the urge to kiss his stupid head.

Eddie blinked dumbly at the proceedings, viewing the world through his drugged up haze.

"Okay, all done." Zhao said with a smile. "Thanks, Mr. Kaspbrak. You can rest now, if you like."

"Thanks," Eddie said. He closed his eyes again and drifted back to sleep. As much as Richie wanted to wake him, he knew Eddie needed rest.

If he woke up once, he'll do it again.

Perforated lung, liver and large intestine.

Worst case.

Richie swallowed. He stood up and raced after Dr. Zhao.

"Hey! Doc!"

She turned slightly. "Mr. Tozier?"

"Is Eddie gonna be okay?" He sounded like a kid again, standing on Eddie's front porch begging for information.

"I can't discuss medical information-"

"Right." *Nobody cares if you love him more than anything. You're not his mom and you're not his wife.* "Just- fuck. Is there anything we should be doing? I gave him ice chips 'cause he couldn't talk. Is that okay or-"

"That should be fine." Zhao paused, clearly debating what she could and couldn't say. "Just water though, and not too much. The IV is doing it's job and we don't want any undue strain on his system."

"Okay. What-"

"I really can't say anything else unless you're family." She interrupted. "If you can get ahold of his wife, she could tell you."

That would be a fun conversation. *Hi, Mrs. Kaspbrak, it's Richie Tozier. No, we haven't met but I'm in love with your husband. Feel like sharing confidential medical information about him? Also how invested are you in your relationship? Not a lot?*

"Okay. Thanks." Richie pushed up his glasses. "For all of it, and treating him like a person and letting me shower here and junk."

Zhao nodded. She looked like she wanted to say something else. Instead she turned hurried down the hallway. Richie leaned back on the wall and let himself breathe for a moment before going back to Eddie.

Something heavy lay on his arm. Eddie blinked under dim lights. *Hospital lights,* his brain supplied. *Not deadlights. Go ahead and look.*

He looked at his arm. The weight came from a big mop of unwashed brown hair attached to one sleeping Trashmouth. Richie sat in a plastic chair, slumped forward, using Eddie's bed as a pillow. He muttered something Eddie didn't understand, because Richie's mouth was on his hand.

Talking hurt but Eddie pushed through. "Richie?"

Richie was up in a second. He looked like absolute shit. "Eds! Hey, man, how ya feeling?"

Eddie ignored him. "Did we kill It?'

Richie blinked. "Yeah, Eddie, we killed him. We made him small, just like you said."

"Good." Eddie said. He glanced around the room. They were alone. "The others-"

"Everyone's fine, Eds." Richie reached up and cupped his cheek. "You saw them. You don't remember?"

Eddie shook his head and what a terrible idea that was. He winced. Richie looked terrified.

Eddie felt terrified. "How long have I been here?"

"Four days. You only started talking again this morning. What's the last thing you remember?"

Eddie thought back. He got stabbed by a clown scorpion thing that tossed him against the wall. *Concussion. Brain damage.*

Don't think about that.

Eddie made himself look at Richie. "I fucked your mom?"

All the colors drained out of Richie's face. He squeezed Eddie's hand like a vise. "Okay. Okay." He glanced at the empty doorway behind

him. "I'm gonna get the doctor. I'll be back-"

The room went cold. Eddie latched onto his arm with both hands. "Stay! Please stay, Richie. I can't-"

"Hey, hey," Richie sat down again. "It's okay. I'm not going anywhere, Eddie, I promise. I'll just-" he reached over and hit the call button. "I'm here, Eddie. I'm not leaving."

Eddie swallowed. His throat was sandpaper. "What did you tell the doctors?"

"We thought we heard kids in the Neibolt house. We went into help and the whole thing collapsed on us."

"Okay." That was plausible enough. Hopefully Eddie's broken brain could remember the cover story.

"Eddie, I-" but Richie was interrupted by the arrival of the doctor. She smiled nicely and asked how he felt.

Dr. Zhao was very obviously tired of him. Richie felt slightly bad about that but not a lot because every anxiety fiber of his mind was obsessed with Eddie's memory.

"Mr. Tozier, memory loss is very common in cases of severe trauma. Mr. Kaspbrak is still heavily medicated. We can't know if it's anything more serious."

"Okay, but he's not forming any new memories!" Richie pushed his glasses up, except they were already all the way up so he just hit himself in the face. "Is that common. Antrograde amnesia?"

"Mr. Tozier, please don't look up symptoms on the internet."

"Well, if you'd fucking tell us what's-"

"Rich." Bill pulled him back and, yes, thank you, Bill. The last thing anyone needed was someone to post Comedian Richie Tozier berating a five foot doctor on YouTube. Richie stepped away, muttering

swears.

"Sorry." He said. "I'm sorry. Just-"

"Go check on Eddie." Bill commanded. Richie nodded. Go check on Eddie. Have the same coversation for the fifth time.

Ben poked his head out of Eddie's room and looked relieved. "He's coming now."

Bev had her hands on Eddie's shoulders, keeping him down. "See? Richie's right here. He's fine."

"Rich." Eddie huffed and stopped struggling. He looked sweaty and a little deranged.

"I'm right here, Eddie." Richie crossed the room in a step. "Relax."

"He woke up a minute ago, started asking for you." Bev explained, letting Richie take her chair. Eddie took his hand and stared at Richie.

"Is It dead?" He asked in a hoarse voice.

"It's dead." Richie assured him. "Totally dead. You were right."

"Bill-"

"I'll get him." Mike bounded out the door, ready for something to do.

Richie knew Eddie's questions by now. He could head him off at the pass. "You've been in the hospital for five days. You got poked pretty good but you're gonna be fine. Everyone is fine. We told them we heard kids in Neibolt and the house collapsed before you got out. We're not gonna leave you."

Mike and Bill appeared in the doorway, following by Zhao. "Mr. Kaspbrak, how are you feeling?"

" 'm okay." He said, sounding like reheated death. "I think."

"Do you remember your accident?"

"House fell on me." Eddie said dutifully.

Good job, baby. Don't tell them about the demon clown or you'll wake up in Juniper Hill. Not that you'll know it.

Zhao asked a few more questions which Eddie half answered. Richie tried to find a bright side. Every time Eddie woke up, he stayed awake a little longer. He always asked the same questions but always with a little more coherence. His eyes got clearer. His grip got stronger.

Zhao finished up listing the options that Eddie had going forward. Richie tried to take it as a good sign, that the doctor thought he'd remember the conversation. Eddie signed two documents and immediately fell back to sleep.

It was dark when Eddie woke up. For an awful second, he thought they left him down in the cavern but no, he lay on a bed. Richie sat in the chair next to him, head back and mumbling, holding Eddie's hand.

"Richie?" His voice was small in the darkness.

Richie heard him anyway, waking with a start. "Eddie-" he'd fallen asleep wearing his glasses. "Hey! You're okay. We killed the clown."

"Oh." *Good.* "The others-"

"They're fine. You got hurt but we got a plan. They're gonna keep you here a couple days and send you down to Bangor. You signed off on it."

That sounded like him. Eddie had excellent insurance.

"Where are the others?"

"They went back to Mike's."

"Why didn't you?"

Richie blinked at him. "You told me to stay, Eds."

"Good." So everything worked out. Clown dead. Everyone safe. Richie next to him.

Richie watched him carefully, thick brows knitting together. "Eddie, are you- how do feel?"

" 'Mokay."

He didn't look convinced. "You've had some memory problems. You always ask the same questions when you wake up."

" 'snormal." *Why are you being weird?*

"Yeah, that's what the doctor said." He took a long breath and let it out. "Eds, I gotta tell you something and I need you to try to remember, okay? Please?"

He was being very weird. "Okay."

Richie watched him without believing. Small, almost invisible tears rolled down his cheeks. He took a deep breath. "I love you, Eddie."

Is that all? "I love you too."

Richie closed his eyes. He shook his head. His voice was the saddest sound he ever heard. "No, Eddie. I'm in love with you."

"I know."

Richie kept shaking his head and talking about how Eddie didn't understand. *He's so fucking stupid.* "No, I love you, Richie. Always loved you."

"Eddie-"

"I love you, Richie. I love you." Once he started saying it, he couldn't stop. Why would he? "I love you."

Richie looked at him like he was a miracle. Why? Hadn't Eddie always loved him? Why hadn't he said anything before?

"I was scared, Eds." Richie whispered. He held Eddie's hand so tight that it almost hurt. "And I didn't know... and we forgot."

"Don' cry, Richie. I love you."

"Fuck, Eddie." Richie kept crying.

"I love you," Eddie stumbled over his words. He blinked hard, trying to stay awake. Richie needed to know. "Love you, Richie. I lub you. I love you." He kept talking, even as his words failed and sleep pressed hard on his brain. "I love you. I love you. I love you."

Spider Stan Uris trying to eat his face sat at a firm high octane nightmare fuel 10 on the Richie Tozier Scare-o-meter (2016 edition). Eddie Kaspbrak run through and tossed into a wall by an enormous clown claw earned the entirely new rank of 16. The morning after Eddie fell asleep murmuring declarations of undying love for Richie Tozier (another 10 on the Scare-o-meter but for very different reasons), was a 5.

5 was bad but not "bring me new pants" bad. 5 was a semi-invisible clown calling him gay, not Bowers on top of Mike with a knife (7). Richie could deal with a 5, probably without even committing felony murder (manslaughter? Who cares?).

Richie dealt with this specific 5, Eddie screaming bloody murder at 7:35 in the morning, by burning his hand at the coffee machine and tripping over his own feet as he sprinted back.

"Richie!" Eddie's lungs were back in a big way. He sounded fucking terrified. "Richie!"

"I'm here!" Richie pushed passed the orderlies and grabbed Eddie's arm. "I'm right here, Eds, you're okay!"

Eddie was not okay. Over grown nails clawed into his arm. "Is It dead?! Richie, is It dead?!"

"It's dead. We fucking killed It, I swear."

"The others-"

"They're fine! They're on their way, I promise!"

He could see the gears of Eddie's brain turn. *Is this a trick? Is it Pennywise? Where's the red balloon?*

"We killed It," Richie said quietly, "It's dead, Eddie."

Finally, Eddie slumped back against his pillow. His adrenaline fueled strength disappeared. Richie finally let out his breath. He glanced around at the buff orderlies and terrified nurse.

"Seriously? Dude's about as threatening as the premie ward and you send in Lou Ferrigno and his steroid addict twin?"

"Beep beep, asshole," Eddie rasped. "Where the fuck are we?"

"Derry General." Christ but it was good to hear his voice. "You've been in and out of it almost a week."

"What happened?" Richie knew the real question. Eddie was awake now, not panicking. He wanted to know the cover story.

"You remember that shit hole on Neibolt street?"

"Yeah?"

"We heard some kids in there, starting poking around and the fucking thing collapsed on us. You fell onto some shit in the basement, fucked up your organs pretty good."

"Oh." Eddie said. "What about the kids?"

That's a new question. Richie blinked. "Didn't find any yet. They're still digging the place out." And what would they find in the end? A pile of half chewed corpses and blood soaked toys? Or would the space magic wipe that away too?

Lots of new questions today.

Still, nothing more than a 3 on his Scare-o-meter, just a creeping

sense of dread. Eddie was awake and talking. He even sounded halfway normal. Plus, thanks to that screaming fit, Richie no longer needed coffee. He sat in the chair next to Eddie, holding his hand. Zhao and Franken-keene appear to go over Eddie's discharge papers. He'd head to Bangor tomorrow afternoon, assuming all went well. Bangor had a rehab specialist that could figure out a treatment or refer him to someone in New York. Eddie frowned at the mention of the city but said nothing.

Richie Tozier didn't have scale for measuring joy. A week ago, if someone asked what made him happy, he'd crack a joke about tits and then talk seriously about the first time he played a sold out venue. He'd vomitted three times before and after that show and tits- well, he was flattered but they were just squishy blobs attached to some girl who screeched in his ear.

If he had a Joy-o-meter, Eddie awake and talking for more than 5 minutes was a 6. Eddie's face when the rest of the losers arrived bumped him straight up to a 7.5. He talked and laughed, never too hard without wincing. He never let go of Richie's hand.

"So what I lost... five days?" Eddie calculated on his unoccupied fingers. "That's not bad for Derry."

"Yeah, we'll see what we remember in Bangor." Bill said.

"You guys really don't have to come."

Everyone ignored Eddie's lie.

"You don't remember anything?" Bev asked.

"Only the traumatic parts," Eddie said and grimaced.

That wasn't even a blip on the Scare-o-meter. Eddie didn't remember their last conversation. If he had, he wouldn't have asked about the clown. Fine, who cares? He'd remind Eddie every goddamn day if he had to, especially it meant a repeat of last night.

I love you, Richie. The words still reverbed around his head. Richie watched him chat easily with the other losers, sounding half way back to normal. *Eddie Kaspbrak loves me.* The idea, unbelievable as it

sounded, gave Richie the warmest feeling in his stomach.

"Oh shit," Eddie said suddenly.

"You okay?" Richie asked, suddenly alert.

"I'm fine," Eddie said. He brought both hands to his face and blew into them. "Has anybody called my wife?"

Right. Richie deflated back into the chair. A 1 on the Scare-o-meter wasn't even real fear, just the undercurrent of imposter syndrome and anxiety that appeared from bombing at a show or suddenly recalling that Eddie had a wife.

Notes for the Chapter:

I know nothing about medicine.

Please Review.

3. Phone Calls

1985

Richie sat shotgun in the blue Pontiac, watching his father stare at the stop light. He fidgeted in the bucket seat, as the snow flakes started to fall. Wentworth Tozier's fingers drummed on the steering wheel.

"Dad?" He'd been sitting in silence for nearly 15 minutes, a personal record, and it was driving him insane.

"Yes?" his dad answered in a flat voice.

"I'm sorry."

Dad softened and met his eyes. "What for, Richie?"

Richie pushed up his glasses. "I got Eddie sick. He'd never made a snowman before, and I wanted t'show 'im how and he got sick-"

"I'm gonna stop you right there, son. You didn't do anything wrong. Eddie got a case of the shivers because you boys were playing outside in February in Maine. That's normal."

"But Mrs. Kaspbrak said-"

The light changed and Mr. Tozier stepped on the gas a little harder than he should have. "Sonia Kaspbrak is a real... piece of work, Richie. There's nothing wrong with that kid except the way she treats him," He shook his head. "And she shouldn't have yelled at you like that."

Richie stared in shocked silence. He had spent the last nine years believing that adults were always right. There were exceptions, sure, like the talk radio hosts his mother hated, and Butch Bowers, but

most adults were always right. Certainly any adult shouting at Richie was entirely justified.

"So Eddie don't got pneumonia?"

"No, Eddie does not have pneumonia." Dad said firmly.

"Can I still play with him?"

He sighed, pulling into the driveway. "That's up to you and Eddie, I guess."

"Not Mrs. Kaspbrak?" *Wonders never cease!*

"No, Kiddo. Mrs. Kaspbrak might make things a little harder but she doesn't get to decide who you're friends with. If you and Eddie want to play, you go ahead and play."

Richie grinned at his father. Mr. Tozier roughed up his hair before opening the car. "I'll say one thing, bud." He guided his son back inside. "With a mother like that, Eddie's gonna need all the friends he can get."

Mike had talked to Myra. More accurately, he had left her voicemails and she had called him back, ranting about insurance scams. Only when Derry General itself had called her, did she actually believe he was there.

That didn't mean she was coming.

"She doesn't like planes," Eddie explained, sheepishly.

"Ok," said Bill. "But you're in the hospital."

"She doesn't like hospitals either." Eddie said. Myra didn't like most things. No, she was afraid of most things. She was afraid of crashing planes and homeless people and contagious diseases. He'd once thought they made a perfect couple because they were afraid of all the same things. He and Myra could have spent the next thirty years safe in their apartment, jumping at every siren.

Then Mike Hanlon called from Derry. Then Eddie drove twelve hours in a rental car, ignoring Myra's calls. Then he fought a leper and got skewered (Richie's word) by a demon clown. Now the idea of returning to the sealed town house felt like pulling dirt into his own grave.

Still, he called her when they left for Bangor. She was still his wife, after all.

She's still your mother.

He punched in her number.

She burst into tears the minute she answered the phone. "Eddie! Where are you, Eddie?!"

Where have I been for the last week? "Derry, Myra."

"Are you coming home?!"

"No," *not ever again.* It wasn't the first time he'd thought it but it was the first time he really meant it. "We're headed to Bangor today, Myra, to see the specialist."

"Then you'll come home?"

No, and I'm not going back to New York either. Eddie closed his eyes. *I don't think I've ever been home in my entire life. Except maybe in the club house.*

"I don't know," he said instead. "It depends on what the doctors say."

"Eddie, I can't-" Myra sobbed, "I can't go to Bangor!"

"Nobody's asking you to," he said in a soothing voice.

"Just come home!"

"I can't."

"Whhhyyy?!"

"Because it's a fucking twelve hour drive and I have holes in my

organs!" Eddie snapped. His wounds began to ache, as if they'd heard him say their name. "There's no reason to go through that kind of strain when there's a perfectly good facility an hour down the road!"

"Don't yell at me!"

"I'm not-" but he absolutely was. "Myra, this has been the plan for days. I just wanted to tell you what's going on."

She sniffled loudly into the phone, making Eddie wince. Christ, his head hurt. "You don't know how worried I've been, Eddie!" She wailed. "You don't know what you put me through! You run off without a word and you don't answer my calls for days and then a stranger tells me you're dying?! I can't cope with this!"

"Myra-"

"I just want you to come home, Eddie. That's all I want. I want my husband home with me. You don't keep how scared I've been."

You've been scared. Eddie grimaced. Of course she'd been scared. Why should that have changed? He could picture her on the sofa, eating and crying and popping pill after pill to calm herself down. They wouldn't work though. They never worked.

"I need you here, Eddie." Myra said.

"I know," Eddie said. "I'm sorry."

A chair scratched across the floor as Richie stood up and crossed the room in three enormous strides. Ice cold panic shot through Eddie's brain but subsided. Richie'd be back. He was getting coffee or taking a leak or something. He wouldn't just *leave* like that.

Myra was still talking. With a worried look at Eddie, Bev went after Richie. Eddie blinked and forced himself to focus.

"I love you so much, Eddie. You're so fragile and I love you so much. If anything happened to you I would die. I would just die."

"Okay, Ma-" He winced again, and not because of his injuries. *You know what a Freudian slip is, Eddie-bear?*

"Myra. I have to go."

"Eddie, wait-"

It's when you say one thing but mean your mother.

"I'll call you later."

"Eddie-"

"Goodbye." He hung up the phone and clicked it into silence. He turned it over so he wouldn't have to see her call him back. He slouched back in the wheelchair and let out the breath he'd been holding.

"You okay?" Bill said, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

"Yeah," Eddie closed his eyes, "aside from the obvious."

He meant the holes in his organs, he really did, but, the way Bill patted his shoulder in quiet sympathy, Eddie thought he meant something else too.

Sonia Kaspbrak is a real piece of work. His father's voice echoed in his head as Richie sped through the hospital.

Guess what, old man, they made duplicates.

He stormed passed Mike and Ben, ignoring their questions. He patted his pockets before remembering his cigarettes were still in his jacket which was tossed out in a biohazard bin because they used it to try and keep Eddie's organs inside his body.

"Fuck. A. Duck." He muttered at the sky.

"Richie?" Bev had followed him into the parking lot.

"You don't have a cigarette, do you?"

She immediately started rummaging through her purse. *Good old Bev.*

"You okay?"

"Gettin' better." He held the cancer stick between his teeth and flicked his lighter three times.

She leaned on a nearby pickup truck and pulled out another smoke. "Went almost a week without smoking and suddenly you need a cigarette."

"Yeah, well." Richie took a long drag and let it out. He stuck the cigarette back in his mouth, not trusting himself to talk. *The fuck are you so bitchy about? You knew he had a wife. You knew he'd have to call her. You chose to stay and listen in.*

But knowing Myra existed felt very different from hearing her voice. Myra Kaspbrak wailed loud enough that Eddie had to hold the phone away from his ear. Richie was about a hair's breadth from grabbing the phone and cussing her out when she started bitching about how hard Eddie's injuries were on her. He almost wished he had.

He took another drag and let it out slowly. "Not sure I like the new Mrs. K," he said.

"No one expected you to." Bev said.

"Real piece of work." Another drag and the nicotine started to do its job. "Wonder how they got together."

The puff of smoke and her red hair made Bev look like a dragon. "You should ask Eddie."

Richie ashed his cigarette against the pickup. "I'll get right on that, Beverly. Soon as I find a rusty nail to jam in my frontal lobe."

"That's not funny." She glared at him. "Did you tell him how you feel?"

Richie took a final drag and threw the butt on to the pavement. "Yes."

"And?"

He crushed it throughly under his sneaker. "And he was hopped up

on painkillers and forgot the entire conversation. And I'm glad he forgot because he's married and he's about to start rehab and he doesn't need to worry about my dumbass feelings while he's going through that shit."

"Richie," Bev touched his shoulder. Richie shrugged away. He pushed up his glasses and wished he could make a joke. He wished anything was funny right now. *Fuck it. This is stupid.*

Mike saved him. He jogged up, sliding his phone into his pocket. "They're loading him up."

"Great!" Richie clapped loudly. "I'll meet you there."

Bev and Mike exchanged looks. Mike scratched the back of his neck. "You don't wanna ride with Eddie?"

He did. "It's just an hour drive," Richie pushed up his glasses, "and they're gonna drug him up for it."

Mike raised an eyebrow. "You wouldn't take 20 minutes to check out of the hotel last week."

"Yeah, well!" Richie wished for another cigarette. "I need to call my manager and I'm not leaving my rental in Derry."

"Okay." Mike raised his hands in surrender. Bev frowned but said nothing. "We'll see you there."

Then they hugged Richie and left him alone with his mind. The car smelled different. He hadn't been inside the thing since he tried to ditch Derry a lifetime ago.

27 years.

How long has Eddie been married?

How long has she talked to him like that?

Don't think about.

He plugged in his GPS and called Steve.

"Well fuckin' well."

"I know." Richie said, turning out of the hospital parking lot.

"You got a lotta of fucking nerve calling me, Tozier. You spew all over your Netflix special, you're MIA in Reno, and after week of radio silence, you got the nads to call me back? Where in Fuck have you been?"

"Derry." Richie turned left on Main street. He slide passed the decaying arcade. Some kids leaned on the dusty window, engrossed in their phones.

"Where the fuck is Derry?"

"Maine."

"Where the fuck is Maine?" He could hear Steve's brow furrow. "Look, you're having some kinda emotional breakdown, I get it. You been hittin' the sauce pretty hard lately, some shit got out of hand. We known each other a long time, I make allowances. I took the liberty of canceling your gig in Vegas."

Shit. Richie had forgotten about Vegas. "Thanks."

"Yeah, yeah, love and light, Richie." Steve said 'love and light' the way people in Georgia said 'Bless your heart' or people in Maine said 'Fuck you faggot.' Richie listened as he took a drag off his ever present joint. Steve got his pot card in 2014, for "anxiety". It had never once worked. "The point is you fucking owe me. So get your fuckin' head right and get your ass to Tuscon by Friday. Understand."

Richie glanced at the dashboard display. Today was Wednesday. "Friday might be cuttin' it close, Steve."

"I'll cut you close if you give me anymore of this bullshit, Richard!"

"I could do Portland on Saturday." Richie hit the breaks. He must have missed a turn. The GPS began to reroute.

"You don't got an audience in Oregon. Hipsters hate you."

"Portland, Maine." Some how, Richie had wound up on a barely paved stretch of road, right at the edge of the barrens. An elevated patch of road with a tunnel to protect it from the spring floods. A place for making out and carving names. The Kissing Bridge.

Richie parked on the shoulder and stepped out of the car, barely hearing Steve's rant.

"You're not staying in fuckin' Maine, Tozier! Get your ass back to America or your career is done, got me?!"

He remembered this place. He remembered coming here alone after they fought the clown the first time. Richie and Eddie went back to his house to clean up. Eddie took a shower while Richie sat on the couch and stared at his shaking hands. Their clothes were ruined so Eddie borrowed some of Richie's. They sat on the couch together, to exhausted for sleep, while some infomercial blasted on the TV.

"You don't get to cancel this many dates, dickhead. Only guy gets to cancel this many dates is Richard fuckin' Pryor. You know why? Because he's fucking dead! Are you fucking dead, Richard?!

No. Richie traced his fingers over the faded letters on the kissing bridge, carved 27 years ago. Because Eddie had his arm over Richie's shoulder. Because Richie turned his face into Eddie's hair and he could smell his own shampoo. Because Eddie smelled like him and Richie could feel his heart beating. Because both of them were alive and together and Richie could have stayed like that for the rest of time.

"You wanna have a career in this business, Tozier? Two outta three things you need. You gotta be good, you gotta be likable, and you gotta show up. You need two outta three and let me tell you something. You are not funny enough that you get to stop showing up!"

Of course they couldn't stay like that for the rest of time. Of course Richie's rental had an electric key. Richie dug through his bag for his pocket knife, remembering how he and Eddie walked their bikes back to the Kaspbrak house. Eddie had hesitated for a good ten minutes before sticking his key in the lock. Then he hugged Richie so tight

that it hurt, the best pain Richie ever felt.

Richie dug the knife into the faded wood as 1987 and 2016 blended together. He could hear Steve and Mrs. K (volumes one and two) bitching in high def surround sound.

"Get to Tuscon, Richie, or so help me I will drop you so fast your head will pop off!"

"You don't know what you put me through!"

"It's that Tozier boy, isn't it?! He put you up to this! You're not well and he kept you out all night!"

In 1987 and 2016, carving their intials into The Kissing Bridge, Richie thought the same thing. *You don't know what you're talking about. If you knew what we went through- if you knew what Eddie did, how he saved everyone- you'd never call him weak again.*

"I'm sorry," Eddie said in 1987 and 2016. What the fuck did he have to be sorry for? What did either of them have to be sorry for?

"Okay, Steve," Richie dug his blade hard into the wood, finishing the E. It looked strong and permanent. "Looks like you're dropping me."

"What?"

He folded the knife up and put it in his pocket. "I'm not going to Tuscon, or anywhere else. It's not professional and I'm sorry but I got things to do here."

"Richie, you gotta be kidding."

"Naw, man, I'm telling you the truth. First time for everything." He ran his fingers over the carving and smiled. "I kinda like it. I'm not doing the tour. I'm done telling other people's jokes."

"You're out of your mind, Tozier. You will never-"

"Thanks for everything, Steve. I gotta go."

Richie turned off the phone and walked back to the car. Suddenly he

knew exactly how to get to the highway. He turned on the radio, just ask Weezer started their cover of Toto's *Africa.* Richie drove fast through the tunnel. Not much had changed. Eddie was still hurt. Eddie was still married. Richie was still in love with him. Richie had just throughly torpedoed his career. Richie didn't care.

Richie drummed on the steering wheel, singing at the top of his voice. "It's gonna take a lot to drag me away from you!" The panic he expected never came. Instead, his father's voice echoed from 1985. *"Mrs. Kaspbrak might make things a little harder but she doesn't get to decide"*

Bill stuck around the hospital while the others checked into their hotel. Eddie's excellent insurance has hooked him up with the best room available. If it weren't for the machines and the nurses that wandered in every few hours, he'd probably forget it was a hospital.

Richie was late. Eddie tried not to worry about it. Mike and Bev explained that he didn't want to leave his rental in Derry and that made sense. Still, this was the longest Richie stayed away since Eddie woke up.

It did give Eddie an opportunity to make some phone calls. He'd have felt like a bad host except Bill had his own calls to make. Big Bill was a busy bee while Eddie was unconscious. He'd rewritten the end of his movie ("best ending I ever did, Eddie") and it apparently made up for stopping production for a week. Eddie caught snippets of his conversation, amazed at how happy he sounded.

Eddie's phone calls were considerably less enjoyable. The excellent insurance had informed his employer of the accident. The begrudging employer agreed to six months paid medical leave. He took it, assuming he could transfer, or quit, when it ended. Why not? Everything else was changing.

His last call went to David Issac Vineman, Esquire. He had settled Eddie's mother's estate five years ago and was still saved in his phone. Eddie talked to him about once every two years, always with the same conversation.

"Mr. Kaspbrak, to what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I need a divorce lawyer. I was hoping you could recommend someone."

Vineman sighed deeply. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes."

"Really? Because, if memory serves, you decided against divorce in 2014 and 2012."

Eddie's side ached. "This is different."

"Last time around, you thought she was poisoning you. I can't imagine what could be worse, to make you finally mean it."

"Look, things have changed." Eddie said, clearing his throat. "I'm leaving Myra. I don't want some ugly, drawn out court battle. I just want to leave."

"Why don't you tell me exactly what happened?"

Eddie gave him the official version. He'd gone to Maine to connect with some friends from childhood. On his last day, they'd heard some kids playing in an old dilapidated house. Fearing for their safety, Eddie went in to clear the children out. The house fell on him and Eddie wound up in the hospital with perforated organs.

"Myra knew I was in the hospital a week ago." Eddie said, more bitterly than he meant to. "She hasn't even come to see me."

Vineman was quiet for a long time. "I'm sorry to hear that, son. I'm sorry for your troubles."

Eddie winced. Vineman said the samething when his mother passed.

"However, I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that major decisions after such a traumatic event are never a good idea. Rather than sueing the city for keeping such an obvious death trap unguarded, you've decided to leave your loving wife of over five years. You've decided to leave the one person who would happily care for you during what

I presume will be a lengthy recovery. Does that sound like the rational choice to you?"

Eddie sighed. "I know what it sounds like but this has been a long time coming. I have friends. I can hire help. I need to get a divorce lawyer. Can you give me a recommendation?"

"Why don't you get back to New York and talk it over with your wife? Get some counciling."

"No. I know what I want." *And I will crawl back under Neibolt and die before I let Myra lock me in that house again.*

He could see it far too easily. Myra, and Eddie's mother before her, had controlled his every move back when he only thought he was sick. Now that something was actually wrong, she would take all the power she could. *"Of course, you haven't taken your pill yet, Eddie Bear. You're tired, go to sleep. I'll take care of you."*

The idea made him shiver enough that Bill started to look worried. "Look," Eddie said, "if you can't give me a recommendation, at least take away her power of attorney. Please."

"You'll have to have it notarized-"

Vineman's drone was over shadowed by a familiar whistle. Richie entered with an easy grin and Eddie's side stopped hurting. Toto's *Africa* died on his lips when he saw Eddie on the phone, but the smile remained. He took the chair next to Eddie and sat quietly.

Like that'll last.

"Mr. Vineman, I have to go. Get started on the paper work or I'll take my business elsewhere. I'll call you tomorrow."

"Mr. Kaspbrak-"

"Thank you." Eddie hung up the phone. "Hey, Richie."

"Hey, Eddie." Richie reached for his shoulder but apparently thought better of it. "How ya feelin'?"

"I'm okay." He put his hand on Richie's arm.

"You sounded kinda badass there. Like you're getting back to normal."

Eddie went red. "What kept you?"

Richie smiled awkwardly. "Yeah, I got a little lost, but I'm good now."

Eddie smiled back. Richie's arm was warm. Eddie could feel the hairs stand on edge as he slid down to his hand. He looked at Richie. Richie stared back, like he was about to bolt.

You held my hand for most of the week, Trashmouth. Eddie closed his fingers around Richie's hand. *My turn.*

Richie fidgeted but didn't attempt to free himself. Instead his smile went wide and bright as he looked up at the ceiling. "Pretty sweet digs, Spaghedward. How good is your insurance?"

"Don't call me that." Eddie squeezed his hand. "My insurance is fantastic."

Notes for the Chapter:

I had a ton of fun with this one. Hope you did too!

Please Review

4. Grounds

"No solid foods, no alcohol, no flying, no operating heavy machinery and no strenuous physical activity for the next three months." Richie scanned Eddie's print out for the forty seventh time. "Sorry, Eddie. There goes your plans to pilot a 747, balls deep in a stewardess while guzzling rum cake."

Eddie frowned at the list of side effects for his antibiotics. "I think they're called flight attendants now. Gender neutral."

"You'll have to wait until November to find out." Richie said. He put the list down and picked up his worn spiral notebook. Eddie didn't bother trying to dicipher his scribbles. Richie's jokes never made sense to anyone but himself.

He closed the notebook and set it down. "How was therapy today?"

"Doc says I'm improving. Managed a couple feet in the walker."

"Shit yeah, you did." Richie grinned. "Prouda you, bud."

"Mmm." Eddie soaked up the praise. "What'd you do?"

Richie shrugged. "Fucked around. Mikey and I found a little hole in the wall Greek joint."

"Yeah?"

Richie spun his pen in his hand. "Y'ever had a gyro, Eddie boy?"

"Those people don't wear hair nets," his mother snapped from 1991.

"Not yet." Eddie said, drowning her out. "Good?"

"Holy shit, put it on the list!" Richie slammed his hand on the nearest

machine, causing his pen to fly across the room. They take some lamb and stick it on the rotisserie, right?"

"You have- " Eddie nodded to the ink between his fingers.

Richie nodded. He stunk his index finger in his mouth and sucked. "They put all these spices on it and pile it on this pita bread with onion and tomatoes. This place in LA, Hestia's, makes tzatziki sauce with crack, I swear to god."

Eddie chuckled and ignored the pain in his side. "Do you like LA?"

Richie shrugged. "It's okay. It's weird and sunny all the time. Honestly I'm touring most of the year so..." Richie trailed off with a frown. Eddie knew he'd canceled a tour to be there. He knew Richie changed the subject immediately whenever anyone brought up his career. He could almost feel sorry about it, except Richie was here. Eddie couldn't manage any of this without Richie there.

"I don't like New York," he said.

"Whaaat? New York's great!"

"It's disgusting." Eddie said. "It's crowded. Everyone is rude on purpose. There are more rats than people."

"Bullshit, there are not!"

"It's true! New York rats have their own wikipedia!"

"Why do you know that?" He grinned. The monitor on Eddie's pulse quickened imperceptibly. Richie didn't notice. The smile took up his whole face raising his cheeks to the corners of his eyes, making the crow's feet visible. *You're so bright.* There was another word but Eddie couldn't think of it. Not when Richie smiled.

"You just haven't been to the good parts." Richie said, jotting something about rats in his notebook. "I performed at this swank ass hotel last year. Some benefit or something. They had this chandelier, looked just like the one in Phantom. Top shelf booze, infinity pool. I'll pick you up next time I'm in town. We'll do a weekend."

Eddie shook his head. "I'm not going back to New York."

The brilliant smile faltered. Richie raised his eyebrows. "What?"

Eddie looked down at his hands. He'd lost a lot of fine motor function in the right, due to evil clown damage in his nerves. He wore a brace after physical therapy to help with the pain. "I don't like New York." He said again. "I never liked it. I'm gonna move."

"That's great," Richie coughed. He pushed his glasses up to the bridge of his nose. "What um- what does the wife think?"

"I don't know." Eddie said. He hadn't answered Myra's calls in three days. "Doesn't matter. I'm leaving her."

Richie's mouth plopped open. He went to push up his glasses but they were already as high as they could go. Instead, he brushed his fingers back over his hair. "That's- holy shit, Eddie. Wow."

"Yeah," Richie was being uncharacteristically careful but Eddie had seen the flash of elation on his face. He wanted it back. "It's been a long time coming. After-" he glanced down at his aching body, "everything, I realized I don't want to waste any more time doing stuff I know makes me miserable."

"Holy shit!" Richie half climbed into his bed, hugging Eddie painfully close.

"Ow! Rich-"

"Shit!" Richie let go immediately. "Sorry! You-"

"I'm fine!" He managed a tense smile.

Richie beamed back at him, joy bursting through his skin. *Radiant.* Eddie thought. *That's the word.*

"Holy shit!" Richie said again. "Holy shit, Eddie, that's awesome! I'm fucking proud of you, man!"

"Thanks," Richie's pride was better than a thousand perscriptions. "Are you crying?"

"No." Richie wiped his eyes. He took off his glasses and cleaned them with the hem of his t-shirt. "What did she say?"

"Nothing yet," and it made Eddie nervous. "I want to take her off as power of attorney before I send the papers. I'm trying to get a lawyer but they're giving me the run around."

"Fuckers." Richie pulled out his phone. "My girl might know somebody."

"What girl?"

"Chick who handled my divorce." He scrolled through his contacts. "I kept her on for like- contracts and shit. She's great. Absolute shark."

"You were married?"

"For a minute, like 8 years ago. Here! Arianna Santos! Lemme call her."

"Rich, no! It's seven at night in LA."

"I'll leave a message." Richie danced out of reach, holding the phone to his ear.

Eddie flopped back onto his pillow, giving up. If Vineman wouldn't return his calls, he should find someone else. Plus, Richie was still grinning, bouncing back on his heels. "Arianna Santos! It's Richie Tozier! You got any contacts on the east coast? My buddy needs to untie the knot, ASAP. Send me some names, please and thanks!"

Eddie watched him tap at the screen. "$50 for East Coast Sharks (Maine preferred)." He slid his phone back into his pocket. "She responds a lot quicker to cash than phone calls."

"You didn't have to do that." Eddie smiled.

"I absolutely did." Richie returned to his chair and carefully put his arm over Eddie's shoulder. Eddie scotched as close as his hospital bed would allow. He could feel Richie sigh into his hair. "Gotta do my part to take down the institution of marriage."

"Sounds like you already did." Eddie said. "You didn't tell us you'd been married!"

"For like a minute!"

"What happened?"

Richie huffed and crossed his arms. "Nothing interesting! I was seeing a girl, we got married, it didn't work "

"Why? She get her vision fixed?"

Richie laughed. "For your information, Cindy always says I was the sexiest guy she ever slept with."

"So what went wrong?"

"Turns out she prefers women."

Eddie laughed and grabbed his side. "Ow, fuck! Jesus."

"You okay?" Richie put a steadying hand on his shoulder, instantly concerned. "Want me to call somebody?"

"No," Eddie said. He eased himself back, still clutching his side. He didn't want anyone else in the room. "I'm fine. Just don't make me laugh."

"Okay," Richie put on a deep frown. "Serious conversation. Taxes. The electoral college. White privilege."

Eddie groaned. "Did you actually marry a lesbian or was that just a joke?"

"Hundred percent verified." Richie smiled wistfully. "Cindy loves women. Only thing we ever disagreed on."

Eddie blinked. "What?"

Richie looked nervous again. He took his hand off Eddie shoulder and dropped it to his side. "I'm uh- I'm gay, Eds."

"Oh." *Holyshit.* "That's great! Uh, congrats."

"Congrats?" Richie repeated. "You're congratulating me?"

"On coming out?" *Edward.Kaspbrak.exe has shut down unexpectedly. Please wait while system reboots.* "That's great!"

Richie relaxed slightly. He brushed his fingers over his hair. "Yeah, it's like you said. Life's too short."

"Yeah." Eddie smiled. He put his hand on Richie's shoulder and squeezed. Richie blinked hard and smiled back. Life was too short but Eddie could have happily spent the rest in that moment.

Richie's shoulders dropped as he leaned back into the chair.

"Gotta say," he shook his head wistfully, "you have the worst timing ever."

"Really?"

"Yeah, only Eddie Kasbrak gets divorced sober."

Eddie grips his shoulders. He grins as Richie regains his senses. "Richie, listen! I think I got him, man."

No.

"I think I killed him for real!"

No, please.

It's too warm and he's too old. He's too slow to stop It.

It rips through Eddie's chest. It happens too quickly but Richie sees every part. Blood pours over Eddie's lips. He coughs and it lands on Richie's glasses.

"Eddie-"

The clown takes him. It tears Eddie away and lifts him up into the deadlights. He flings Eddie away like he's nothing. Richie screams.

"Eddie! Eddie!" Pennywise mimics in an awful sing song. "Eddie's deadie, Trashmouth! Can't change it now, you little faggot! You all die! You all float!"

Claws crash around him. Richie covers his face. He tries to run. The Clown is fucking with him, laughing.

"Stronger than he thought he was! He didn't feel very strong to me! Myra and Mommy were right all along, huh?"

It grabs Richie in a crushing vice and pulls him close. Richie chokes on the stench of It. "Got a joke for ya, Richie! Guy walks into the sewers, says "Let's kill this fucking clown," and he believes it!"

The clown tosses it's head back and laughs, crushing Richie tighter with each guffaw. "And everyone he loves is dead! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Richie's glasses have fallen. Everything blurs. All he can see is the mouth of Pennywise, grinning with too many teeth. His squirming means nothing. He's trapped.

Floating.

"Don't like it? Eddie thought it was a real gut buster! Geddit, Richie?!"

"Richie!"

"Geddit?! Because you couldn't save him!"

"Richie, wake up!"

Richie came to fighting. He flailed wildly, smacking Mike in the face. "Wh- Mike!?"

"Yeah, Rich, you're okay." Mike said in a low soothing voice. "Just calm down. You're okay."

He was on the floor. The carpet was soft, forest green. Richie couldn't make out much else.

"Here, Richie-" Bill held out his glasses. Richie dropped them twice before shoving them onto his face. Mike and Bill crouched in front of

him, looking terrified. He could see Bev in the doorway, watching with grim understanding.

Ben's voice rang clear from the hallway. "He's fine. Just a nightmare! Sorry to wake you!"

He poked his handsome face through the doorway. "Richie? You okay?"

Absolutely fucking not. Richie couldn't speak. He just kept looking around at his friends, heart pounding too fast.

Bev broke the silence. "What did you see? Which one of us-?"

"Eddie-" Richie said, sounding just as he had in the cavern.

Bev nodded. "Ben, get my phone."

He hurried back to their room as Bev knelt in front of Richie. She wore an oversized blue t-shirt that very obviously belonged to Ben and her hair was a mess. Mike and Bill crouched on either side, in varying states of worried and sleep addled. Richie wanted to apologize but his throat was too dry. He could still taste Eddie's blood.

"It's okay." Bev said. She gripped his forearms and watched his eyes. "It's okay, Richie. You're fine. Tell me what you saw."

"E-eddie-" he shook his head. He didn't want to tell her, but Beverly's eyes insisted. "Fuh-fuckin' clown-"

Mike paled visibly and Bill grabbed his shoulder. Richie could read their thoughts. *What if we failed again? What if It's still down there?*

Only Bev stayed calm. "Under Neibolt? Like before?"

Richie nodded, unable to give it voice.

"It's not real, Richie." She allowed for no argument. "It's never going to be real. It's the deadlights. It's the deadlights and trauma mixed together but none of it is real."

Richie nodded, even as a treacherous voice giggled in his head. *This isn't real enough for you? What do you know about real, Trashmouth? When I'm inside your head?*

"It's not real." Bev insisted. Ben appeared at her side, phone in hand. Bev held it up, showing Richie her lockscreen. The Losers, Bev and Stan excepted, gathered around Eddie's hospital bed, all laughing and crying. Richie held Eddie's hand. It was the first time Eddie had woken up, really woken up, and remembered everything from the last time he woke up. Ben was the only one of them facing the camera, probably because Bev was taking the picture. Everyone else looked at Eddie. Eddie looked at Richie.

"This is real." Bev said. "Eddie's fine. You saw him a few hours ago, remember?"

She turned and sat on the floor next to him. Together, they scrolled through last night's pictures. When Eddie told the others he was leaving Myra, and Bev announced she'd sent the papers to Tom that morning, they insisted on throwing a "Divorce Party". Mike ordered a traveling notary while Ben and Richie raided the kitchen. Bev took photos of Eddie signing the paperwork with Richie and Bill serving as witnesses. They all posed with the notary, a confused woman in her late 50s, and the party began in ernest.

There was a selfie of Bev and Eddie as "Divorce Buds".

A shot of Eddie rolling his eyes at Richie's impromptu "Divor-sert", a bowl of chocolate pudding with a candle sticking out of it. Another of Eddie blowing the candle out and scooping out all the pudding it had touched.

Mike and Bill dancing to New Kids on The Block while Ben covered his face to hide his grin.

Bev kissing Ben.

Mike and Bill apologizing to the night nurse who reminded them that they were in a hospital with people trying to sleep.

Richie taking a selfie with the night nurse so she could impress her

nephew.

Bill, Mike and Richie playing with Eddie's wheel chair.

Eddie arguing with Richie.

Eddie laughing at Richie.

Richie with his arm around Eddie's shoulder, eyes closed, lips in his hair.

"That's real." Bev said, tears rolling down her cheeks. "He's just across the street, honey. We can go see him right now."

Richie shook his head. Eddie had enough on his plate without Richie losing the rest of his marbles. "Don't tell him." He looked around at the rest of the losers. "Please don't tell him."

"Okay," Mike nodded.

"We won't tell him." Bill promised.

Only Bev looked unwilling. "He can handle it."

"I know..." he said in a broken voice. "I can't handle him handling it."

She pulled him into a tight hug. "Okay, Richie."

There was no more discussion. Ben closed the door and they all climbed into Richie's bed together. Richie got squished between Bev and Mike, with Bill and Ben on the outside. He fell asleep to their heartbeats, their breath on his skin. His friends, his family, held him through the night and Richie slept well.

Arianna Santos set him up with a woman named Nisha Bishera. She sent over the paper work the very next day and offered to meet up with Eddie in person if he had any questions. Which was good, because Eddie had nothing but questions.

"What do I put for grounds?" His head ached. "Why the fuck do I need

grounds?"

"Take it up with New York state." Mike said. He sat on the floor next to Bill, reading over the legalese.

"Let's see," Richie pulled out his phone and typed. "Grounds for divorce, New York."

He looked tired, despite the coffee he kept guzzling. He sat at Eddie's side, as always, taping irritably. "There are seven legally accepted reasons for divorce in New York. What sounds right? Irretrievable breakdown in relationship for at least six months."

"I'm not waiting six months." Eddie needed to be divorced fucking yesterday.

"Cruel and inhumane treatment?" Richie gave him a worried look.

Eddie swallowed. He wanted his marriage to be over, not dragged out in front of a judge and dissected. It wasn't as if he could prove anything. It wasn't as if Myra ever hit him or stole his money. He'd been certain she was dosing him in 2014, enough that he'd stopped eating at home. He'd told Vineman who told him to contact the police. Eddie second guessed himself and did nothing.

Beyond that was nothing, just the smothering sense of weakness she encouraged. Just a dozen temper tantrums a day when he tried to do or say anything Myra didn't specifically approve of.

"It was awful, Your Honor. She brought me breakfast in bed and asked me to take vitamins!"

"It's my job to take care of you, whether you like it or not."

"Oh shit," Something else caught Richie's eye, "Constructive abandonment.' When's the last time you got laid, Eddie?"

"Beep, Beep!" The Losers chorused around him.

"Seriously!" Richie showed Eddie his phone. "If it's over a year, refusal to have sex counts!"

It was over three years but Eddie refused to admit that. "I don't think it counts if neither of us tried."

A bright, incredulous smile spread across Richie's face. His eyes twinkled behind his glasses. Looking at him, Eddie almost forgot that he'd wasted the last five years.

"Put a pin in that one." Richie cleared his throat. He turned back to his list. "You could go to jail for three years."

"That's kind of like staying married."

"Boom! Eds gets a good one!" Richie laughed. "What else? Adultery?"

"Doc said no strenuous activity," Eddie said. He gave Richie a sidelong glance. "We'd have to wait."

Richie nearly toppled out of his chair. His phone flew across the room as he tried to right himself. He went bright, bright red, starring at Eddie.

Bill stood up and made for the hallway. "Gonna grab a soda, guys."

"I'll help," Mike followed.

"We should make sure they don't get lost," Bev said, pulling a grinning Ben along with her.

Richie didn't notice or acknowledge their absence. He just stared at Eddie. His mouth was open, just barely, pale pink lips parted and trembling.

Kiss me. Eddie willed Richie to understand. *You're too far to reach and I don't trust myself to stand.*

He might have risked the fall if Richie hadn't suddenly remembered himself. He stood and walked like a disjointed puppet to retrieve his phone. He muttered something to himself, sliding the phone back into his pocket. When he looked at Eddie, his cheeks were still red.

"Hey, Richie?"

"What?"

I love you.

"Thanks for staying with me," Eddie waved at the piles of paperwork and surrounding medical equipment. "For all of this."

Richie smiled, blinking hard. "Of course, Eds."

I love you.

"Seriously, I couldn't do this without you."

Something snapped in Richie. He crossed the room in one long stride, knelt down and grabbed Eddie's hand. His hands were enormous, pressed hot and tight over Eddie's fingers. "Yes, you could." He spoke with such intensity he sounded almost angry. Hot breath pushed onto Eddie's skin with every word he spoke. "You could do this without anyone."

"Okay," *You're wrong but I love you.* "But you make it better."

Richie smiled goofily. He dropped his gaze and, for a moment, Eddie thought he was going to kiss his hand. Instead, He pressed his forehead into their fingers, shaking with silent laughter. "What are you doing to me?"

Eddie smiled, 100% sure he wasn't supposed to hear that.

"Can I stay with you?" Richie looked up, eyes wide. "When I get out?"

"Of course!" Richie answered, too excited to control his voice. "Yeah! Fuck yeah! As long as you want!"

Forever. Eddie thought. He watched Richie climb back to his chair, talking animatedly about how much Eddie would love California. He never let go of his hand, not even when the others cautiously returned. *Is forever good for you?*

Notes for the Chapter:

Seriously, the rules for divorce in New York state are

fucked all the way up. Just let people not be married anymore!

I really hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it. Please Review! Comments make my life!

5. Eddie Kaspbrak Makes a List

Nothing lasts forever. After two weeks of heartwarming trauma, the Losers had to return to their own lives. Actually, Bill had to return to his own life. Mike had to "get the fuck out of Maine." They waited until Eddie was 100% stable, and allowed to leave the hospital for hours at a time.

They went out for a final Losers lunch, a chill little Indian joint. Eddie ordered lassi and the "mildest curry you have" while the others gorged on naan and basmati rice. Ben and Bev held hands under the table. Mike mapped out his grand USA tour while Bill promised to visit as soon as he finished shooting. Richie just watched, quiet for once, basking in the glow of his friends.

As the meal wound down, Mike stood up. "I went back to Derry a couple days ago," he said, pulling a folded envelope from his pocket, "to finish packing everything. There's no activity around Neibolt. Looks like the city's just gonna leave it."

The others exchanged dark looks. "Anyway, I found this waiting for me," his voice wavered as he pulled the paper free. "It's from Stan."

"Jesus," Bill whispered.

They all looked at the empty chair, Stan's chair.

"I think he sent one to all of us," Mike said. "I don't know how he-" he broke off with a sharp inhale.

Bill reached up and took his hand. Mike nodded. He read aloud.

"Dear Losers,

I know what this must seem like but this is not a suicide note. You're probably wondering why I did what I did. It's because I knew I was too scared to go back, and if we weren't all together, if all of us alive weren't united, I knew we'd all die."

Richie glanced at Eddie. He stared down at the brace around his

hand, at the wheelchair he was confined to outside of therapy. Richie took his hand and squeezed. *It could have been so much worse.*

"So I made the only logical move. I took myself off the board." Mike took a deep, shuddering breath. Tears rolled down his cheeks. Then, inexplicably, he laughed. "Did it work?"

Richie snorted. Eddie grinned. Bev pressed her face into Ben's shoulder, shaking with giggles and sobs. Bill wiped his eyes, laughing through tears. "Fucking Stan."

"Well, if you're reading this, you know the answer." Mike's smile faded as Stan continued. "I lived my whole life afraid. Afraid of what would come next. Afraid of what I might leave behind."

Eddie's grip tightened around Richie's fingers.

"Don't. Be who you want to be. Be proud. And if you find someone worth holding onto, never let the go. Follow your own path, wherever that takes you."

Bill stared to cry again, covering his face with his hand. Bev pulled him into a tight hug, with Ben's arms around them both.

"Think of this letter as a promise, a promise I'm asking you to make. To me. To each other." Mike took another deep breath. "An oath."

He let the weight of those words settle down on them. An oath had brought them here, kept them alive. They were here because of Stan's sacrifice, because of his love.

"See the thing about being a loser is you don't have anything to lose." Mike smiled again. "So be true. Be brave. Stand. Believe. And don't ever forget. We're losers and we always will be."

He folded the letter carefully and sat down again. Bill pulled him into the hug.

"Richie," Eddie said in a soft voice.

"Yeah," Richie wrapped his arms around his shoulders, careful of his wounds but wanting Eddie as close as possible. He pushed his face

into his hair, breathing Eddie in.

Richie wasn't sure how long they stayed like that, overcome with grief and comfort. Eddie, stronger than all of them, lifted his glass. "Thanks, Stan," he said, watching the empty chair. "We miss you."

The others followed suit, toasting their fallen friend. "Thanks, Stan."

"Love you, Stan."

Bill set his glass down hard. He rubbed his eyes, unable to stop the flow of tears. "I hope he was happy. Fuck, I really hope he was happy."

Mike took his hand and squeezed. "Me too."

They were quiet for a long time, hugging and crying. Then Eddie cleared his throat. "I want to thank you guys, for staying so long. You didn't have to."

Richie scoffed. Like he had any other option.

Bill nodded firmly. "Obviously, we weren't gonna just leave you."

Eddie smiled. "Thanks anyway."

Mike leaned back in his chair and wiped his eyes. "You all are my best friends. I love you."

"Love you too, Mikey." Bill said.

Bev wiped her face with a napkin. "Can you guys stop making me cry for two seconds? My fucking eyeliner."

Ben kissed her cheek. "Let's not wait another 27 years, huh?"

Everyone agreed. Plans were made for the holidays, weekly phone calls and group texts. They argued over the check. Eventually Bill headed to the airport and Mike set off in his rental. Bev and Ben were sticking around for another few days before returning to Chicago to clear out her townhouse. Richie offered to provide backup but Bev dismissed it immediately.

"You're booked, Tozier." She nodded at Eddie, walking ahead with Ben.

"Hey, I'm moving in with him." God that felt good to say out loud. "The fuck else do you want?"

"Honestly communication without the presence of anesthesia." She teased. They walked arm in arm behind the others. She smiled at her boyfriend's butt. "You and Ben, I swear to God. Can't spit it out without a near death experience."

"Look, I'm barely out of the closet." Richie blushed. "Don't rush me."

"Be proud, Rich." Bev said.

Richie rolled his eyes. Leave it to Stan The Man Uris to roast him from beyond the grave.

She dropped it when they got back to Eddie's room. Eddie climbed back into bed while Richie spotted him. He smiled sleepily. "Guys, this was great but I'm about to pass out."

"Yeah, we're going back to the hotel." Ben said.

"You guys need anything?" Bev asked, kissing Eddie's forehead.

"Naw," Richie took his spot next to Eddie's bed. She kissed his forehead too and glanced meaningfully at Eddie.

"See you later."

They closed the door on their way out. Richie watched Eddie snuggled under his sheets, moments away from sleep. Bev and Stan were right. He ought to say something, now that Eddie could remember things and before they moved in together. He couldn't just spend the rest of his life basking in the easy comfort of friendship, never being honest with the man he loved.

"Eddie?"

"Yeah?" Eddie watched him through half closed eyes.

"You're gettin' discharged soon. Where do you wanna go?" Richie could bask a little longer.

"Gonna stay with you." Eddie mumbled, as if Richie could ever forget.

"Okay but like... in Maine? New York?" Eddie wrinkled his nose. "You wanna get an apartment?"

"Doesn't matter, Rich. Lemme sleep."

Richie brushed his fingers over Eddie's hair. He could bask forever. "Okay, Eds. Get some sleep."

Eddie made a sound like a cat. In a moment, he'd drifted into slumber. Richie just watched.

Eddie insisted on sitting in a normal chair when his lawyer visited. Now that he could get out of bed on his own, under supervision, he refused to spend anymore time in it than absolutely necessary. Richie looked equally proud and nervous every time but said nothing. He just grabbed Eddie's walker and made sure he didn't fall. Once Eddie was situation, Richie sat next to him, nervously drumming on the table.

Nisha Bishera arrived promptly at 10 o'clock. She looked like an upstart senator, in an immaculate black suit and cerulean hijab. She smiled broadly and offered her hand. "Mr. Kaspbrak, it's good to see you in person."

"Eddie, please." Eddie said. "This is Richie."

Her smiled turned into a smirk. "Arianna told me about you, Mr. Tozier."

"All lies." Richie said, shaking her hand. He immediately pushed up his glasses.

"I bet." Bishera sat down and took out a thick manilla envelope. "I just wish we were speaking under better circumstances."

Eddie nodded, prepared for an explosive headache. "Myra refused to sign, right?"

She nodded. "She was extremely upset when you revoked power of attorney. According to my assistant, she attempt to invoke involuntary commitment."

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

She raised an eyebrow at Richie. Eddie suspected that Nisha Bishera, Esquire never kidded anyone in her life. "Obviously, she can't as you're clearly of sound mind and not a risk to yourself or others. No judge is going to take you out of the hospital to put you in another one."

Richie huffed, clearly holding back a very colorful rant.

"So what do we do?" Eddie asked.

"Well, legal separation is out. Now, you can seek a judgment of separation, where in we'll have to appear in front of a court and outline your reasons, or we can jump straight to divorce-"

"Divorce." Eddie said immediately. *Just get me out of this marriage.*

"In which case, you'll need further grounds." She finished.

"I'm sorry, can't he just leave?" Richie looked at Eddie. "I got a rental, dude, we can just go."

"I don't recommend it. Abandonment leaves you open to more legal ramifications. She could easily sue for financial or emotional damages. I doubt she has a case but a vindictive person could drag something like this out for years."

Eddie sighed. "I just want a divorce. I don't want to owe her anything. I don't want to see her. I just want it done."

She nodded. "I'll do everything in my power to make that happen." She took a small notebook out of her bag. "I spoke with your former attorney, Mr. Vineman. He mentioned an incident in 2014? Can you tell me about?"

Yes. Eddie told himself firmly. *You fought a demon clown. You can talk about your wife.*

He might have preferred fighting Pennywise. Richie watched him with an awful worried frown. Eddie took a deep breath. "Rich, give us a minute."

A brief flash of hurt crossed his handsome face. "Sure, yeah." He stood up too quickly, grabbing his phone. "I'll be outside. Call if you need anything."

"Thanks." Eddie tried not to feel too bad. He couldn't stand Richie knowing how weak he'd been.

He closed the door behind him. Eddie took another deep breath. "It was around March, 2014. I started feeling really run down. More so than usual. I went to my doctor and he said I was stressed. So I started putting in fewer hours, doing yoga, meditating- all that stuff. Nothing helped. I started losing time. I'd sit down at the dinner table and wake up on the couch with Myra. She said I fell asleep but I didn't remember eating or getting up. I noticed it was always around meals- the meals Myra made. I thought-"

You sound paranoid. Delusional. What's wrong with you. Ms. Bishera kept her face perfectly neutral as Eddie fought the doubt in his head.

"Myra had these sleeping pills, right?" He stared down at the table. "Dormatrine. She'd horde 'em, in case she had a bad night. I got it in my head that she was dosing me. Crushing up pills and putting them in my food."

"You thought she wanted to kill you?"

Eddie shook his head. "Myra always says I need to slow down. I'm- she thinks I'm fragile. She probably thought I needed to relax and... then she made me."

Are you defending her, you fucking pussy? Couldn't leave when she was poisoning you so you make it sound like love?

"I stopped eating at home." He said. "Taught myself how to cook, slipped the stuff she made into my napkin and dumped it out. In a

couple days, my energy's up. I'm not blacking out anymore."

"Did you ever confront her? Go to the police?"

Eddie shook his head. Confronting Myra required a backbone he didn't have yet. "I never had any proof. I got sick and then I got better. Myra keeps her pills stashed all over, I couldn't be sure there wasn't another bottle somewhere."

His wounds burned with shame and embarrassment but he forced himself to continue. "I didn't want to upset her. When I started cooking for myself- you'd have thought I jumped off the Brooklyn bridge. She'd go on and on about how I was messing up, how I couldn't possibly cook on my own without burning down the house or giving myself salmonella." A new and comforting anger surged forward. "I don't even eat eggs! My mother told me I was allergic to eggs so I never ate an egg in case she was telling the truth."

She made another check in her notebook. "Is Myra often controlling?"

Eddie nodded. "She didn't want me to work, insisted we could just live off her inheritance. She thinks I'll get myself killed every time I drive, even though I've had exactly one accident. I wanted to take tennis lessons, she told me I'd get hurt. Everything beyond taking my meds and listening to her scream about everything was a huge fight. Eventually, I stopped trying to cook for myself and just ate at work. I haven't had a meal in my own house for two years."

He sat back, exhausted from the monologue. Bishera finished writing and set down her notebook. He waited for her to dismiss him, explain that he ungrateful and paranoid. She didn't. She just watched him solemnly and picked up her pen.

"Okay, you definitely have a case for cruel and inhumane treatment. Pretty iron clad too."

Eddie blinked. "I don't have any proof."

She frowned at him. "Eddie, you were subjugated in your own home. Your wife denied you basic self reliance and created an atmosphere of intimidation and fear." Her voice grew harsh, almost angry. "You

don't deserve that. No one does. Anyone who advised you to remain in that house did you a grave disservice."

Holy shit.

"I know it must have been difficult to share that with me." She said in a softer voice. "Thank you."

"Yeah," Eddie said.

Nisha Bishera absently tugged her ring finger and inhaled. "I want to get this filed as soon as possible but I want to do it right. Please write down any other incidents of abuse, as best you can remember them with dates if you can. Anything you can think of, no matter how small. Don't second guess yourself."

"Okay." Eddie pressed his hands on the table, trying to keep from shaking. The task sounded daunting. The word abuse gave him pause. Myra did fucked up shit but she wasn't abusive. He just had to stay one step ahead of her, and-

Live like rat in my own house, scared to say a word out of line.

"Excellent!" Ms. Bishera gave him an encouraging pat on the shoulder. "I'd like to file on Monday, if possible. Does that work for you?"

"Sure," Eddie said. He felt dazed. Not tired but like he'd just woken up in an unfamiliar room. Ms. Bishera went over a few extra papers, explaining that he might have to testify in front of a judge. She spoke with absolute confidence and Eddie believed her.

"Do you have any questions for me?"

Eddie shook his head. "Thank you."

"Thank you. I'll be in touch soon. I hope the rest if your day is more enjoyable."

Eddie grabbed his walker and showed her to the door. Richie sat on the floor, facing Eddie's room. Eddie could hear the guitars twanging from his airphones. He had a sudden vision of Richie as a teenager,

playing hooky and smoking behind the school. It made an enjoyable picture.

He got up like an old man, bracing against the wall. Another enjoyable picture. "Hey," he pocketed his air pods. "What's up?"

"I've got what I need to get started." She nodded to them both. "I'll talk to you soon."

"Thanks again," Eddie said.

She nodded and strode down the hall. Richie watched until she disappeared around the corner. "How was it?"

"Good." Eddie said. "Intense but... she's good."

"Good," he followed Eddie back inside and closed the door. Eddie returned to the table, suddenly tired. Richie lingered at the door, shifting his weight between his legs. "So... uh, what did you- obviously you don't have to tell me but what did you-"

"Just... marriage bullshit." Eddie sighed. "I don't wanna get into it again."

"Cool." Richie's glasses were already pushed up so he just touched the bridge of his nose. He fidgeted, clearly wanting to ask and respect Eddie's privacy at the same time. *Some day, Rich. If I get brave enough.*

"Can you grab my laptop?" Eddie said. He nodded to the bag by his bed. Richie jumped at the task, eager for something to do. Except handing Eddie his laptop took roughly 5 seconds and then Richie was back to standing awkwardly.

"Dude, just sit down at talk to me." *I'll definitely need the distraction.* "Tell me about LA."

Richie grinned and sat down. "Okay, so I'm in Noho, right? That's North Hollywood, we have tons of hoes. Anyway, it's been gentrified to shit but I got in on the ground floor with rent control. It's a studio but it's big. Gorgeous wood floors-"

Notes for the Chapter:

It's just been raining on my face.

(Sorry Stan)

Please Review

6. Richie Tozier Takes a Hit

"Two bed, two bath, three blocks to the beach and two hours from the city." Richie said, showing Bev the listing on his phone. "We've got it for the weekend, in case Eddie suddenly hates it."

"People lie on those things all the time." Eddie said.

"You don't have enough faith in humanity," Richie said, just happy to hear him talk. Eddie had been exhausted since he finished up the divorce paper worker. He hadn't even tried for the walker when they went to join Ben and Bev for their farewell lunch.

"You have too much faith in the internet." Eddie said, like he'd just mixed orange juice and mouthwash.

"You're gonna lecture me on believing stuff I read on the internet?" Richie raised an eyebrow.

Eddie looked like he wanted to argue but instead he just sipped his water. Richie tried not to take it personally. Eddie had spent most of the weekend writing out every terrible thing Myra had done over their five years of marriage. He steadfastly refused to talk about it and Richie couldn't blame him. He also couldn't stop his brain from imagining a dozen stomach turning scenarios that would constitute cruel and inhumane treatment, unless he focused relentlessly on the future.

So... beach house.

"Looks cozy," Ben said, leaning over Bev's shoulder. Richie wondered why they bothered getting two chairs. He had his arm around her waist. She leaned back into his chest.

When the fuck is your flight again?

"I'll just be glad to get out of Maine." Eddie said. "Mike had the right idea, heading to the other end of the country."

Richie grinned. "Hey, LA's still waiting for you. I've got my assistant

looking for two bedrooms as we speak."

Richie's assistant was Richie after Eddie went to sleep. Looking for apartments was much better than risking another scream awake deadlights nightmare. But Eddie didn't need to know that.

He heard enough screaming from Myra.

She had reacted... poorly to the divorce papers. In addition to refusing to sign, she left Eddie a dozen shrieking voicemails. They left Eddie shaking. That's why his phone was currently off and resting at the bottom of his suitcase.

"Let me answer it next time," Richie had begged, holding Eddie's hands in his. *"Seriously I'm great with Kaspbrak women. I'll have her eating out of my hand."*

That at least got Eddie to smile. *"No. You just want to yell at her."*

"Me? Yell at your bitch ex-wife?" Richie feigned shock. *"Yes, absolutely I do."*

But he had let it go, as Eddie instructed, and they'd gone to see their friends. Richie pushed his chair and reminded Eddie of a future where that harpy wouldn't affect him at all.

"Bill went farther than Mike." Ben said. "Got a whole ocean between him and Derry."

Eddie shuddered. "Planes are disgusting. Bill sat through a ten hour flight from Portland to London. Ten hours in a metal death tube, full of recycled air and pretzel farts. He'll be lucky if he doesn't contract TB."

"They don't let people with TB on the plane, Eds."

"They aren't supposed to let people with TB on the plane, Richard."

Bev's fork dropped with a loud clang. She went chalk white with a barely audible "Fuck!"

"What's wrong?" They followed her stare to the cafe entrance where a

tall man in a dirty suit swayed by the door.

Eddie squinted. "Is that-?"

"Yep." Richie said.

Tom Rogan scanned the room. He didn't look like he did on the cover of GQ last year. He had about a week's worth of stubble and a nasty scowl. His suit, while fancy, was wrinkled and stained.

Richie looked back at his friends. Bev slouched as low as she could without sliding under the table. She might have made it if Ben wasn't holding her so close. His handsome face bent into the deepest frown Richie'd ever seen. It went beyond anger. For the first time since Richie had known him, Ben Hanscom was furious.

"I got this." Richie said and stood up.

"Richie!" Eddie snapped but he was already halfway across the room. He grinned, holding his arms wide.

Fuck this domestic abuse shit bag. We fought a shapeshifting space clown! I've kicked your ass a dozen times on Sunset.

"Tom Rogan!" He clapped the stranger on shoulder, deftly turning him away from Bev. "How the hell are you, man?"

"Who-"

"Richie Tozier!" He moved his grip deftly to the other man's neck and squeezed hard. "We met at that thing with the pants! Pants Con? Pants Across America? Pants-demonia? Anyway! Wanted to ask- why do they call a fly that? It's just a zipper, right? Why does the crotch gaurd get a special title? Also, can you bring back velcro? Because between the buttons and the zippers, there are too many steps between me and my dick, you know?"

The last horse, reeking of expensive bourbon, crossed the finish line and Rogan twisted in Richie's grip. "Get the fuck off-" bleary eyes traveled back to Bev, then back to Richie. "Youfuckmywife?"

Richie's voice dropped low. "Naw, dude. I'm trying to stop you

fucking yourself. You gotta sleep this off and let it go, Tommy. It's over."

Richie's eloquence was wasted on most people, but none more than the neanderthal Bev had divorced. Tom pushed him off and bellowed some charming approximation of "You fuck my wife". Richie dodged the first punch easily as various people shouted.

"Seriously, what's the end game here?" *You beautiful bastard! I've wanted to punch so many people this week and you're the first one close enough!* "You're gonna show up plastered and kidnap her? This isn't a Disney moo-"

The world blurred as his glasses went flying. *Mom's gonna kill me!* Thirty five years of "don't break your glasses" easily outweighed the blood spurting from his nose. He fumbled around finally grabbing the dark frames as something heavy hit the floor.

More people screaming. Ben had Rogan on the floor. Richie had to assume in was Rogan because his face was covered with blood and fists. Ben didn't make a sound, just whaled on him without pause. Every inch of shit Ben Hanscom ever took poured through his hands and on to Tom Rogan's face.

It took two bus boys and a line cook to pull Ben away. He went quiet, breathing like a cage fighter.

"Ben!" Bev pushed through the bus boys to reach him.

"Beverly," Ben whispered. She cupped his cheek in her palm, tears in her eyes.

They looked like the title card for an LifeTime Original miniseries.

"Holy shit!" Someone said, breaking the spell. "Gun! He's got a gun!"

Ben pulled her close, shielding her with his body. Richie looked around dumbly, trying to find the new threat.

"Oh fuck." He whispered, watching the line cook crouch over Rogan's unmoving form and retrieve the 9 millimeter from his waistband. "Dude had a gun..."

"Richie!" There was Eddie. He leaned heavy on the table, wheelchair abandoned. Fear and anger fought across his pale face.

"Shit, Eds!" Richie stood, grabbing his shoulders. He didn't weigh a pound as Richie guided him a chair. "You okay?"

"Am I-" Anger won. "Richie, who gives a fuck! You-"

Eddie didn't verbalize what Richie was. He ran his fingers over Richie's face, his hair, his forehead, his cheeks-

"Ow!"

"Yeah, your nose is broken." Eddie said. He grabbed a pile of napkins, never taking his eyes off Richie, and pressed them to his nose.

"Ow." Richie said again.

"Lean forward," Eddie instructed. "Are you dizzy?"

"Little." Probably because Eddie was still touching him. Hell, he'd leaned into it. All he'd have to do was go a little further, angle his face right and they would kiss. If he went just a little further, and angled his face right, Richie was certain his nose wouldn't hurt anymore.

"Can we get some ice over here, please?" Eddie called.

"Ooo, Doctor K!" Richie said breathy drawl. "You take such good care a me!"

"Shut up," Eddie muttered, "and breathe through your mouth."

Richie obeyed. Eddie didn't take his hands away.

Richie's nose was broken. Ben was out $120 for bail since he did technically assault someone. Tom Rogan sat in jail on charges of felony stalking, attempted kidnapping, and attempted murder. The judge ruled him a flight risk so no amount of bail was getting him out of Maine anytime soon. Bev had Ben back in their hotel. Eddie suspected they wouldn't emerge for at least 24 hours.

That left him alone with Richie. Richie sat on his bed, inspecting his broken glasses. They had fallen off in the bathroom, finally spliting across the bridge. "RIP, friends." He muttered. "You survived a demon space clown but you couldn't survive linoleum."

Eddie wheeled himself over. "I think getting sucker punched had something to do with it."

"You act like I never got beat up before." Richie said. "We grew up on premium Bowers violence. This shit barely registered."

"Registered to me," Eddie muttered. He rolled closer. Hours later, he was still keyed up. His brain flooded with adrenaline when Rogan shoved Richie. He'd stood without thought the moment his fist connected and Richie dropped out of sight.

Eddie's legs didn't get the memo. He staggered like a newborn foal, bracing himself on the table, trying to get to Richie without falling.

Ben had moved like lightning. He tackled Rogan at the waist, pinned him in seconds. Henry Bowers (*Rest in Pieces*) never landed so many hits, but Eddie was too focused on Richie to really care.

"Hey," Richie broke him out of his thoughts. "Be honest?"

Eddie blinked at him. "What?"

"Is my modeling career over?" Richie framed his face with his hands.

Eddie snorted despite himself. Richie gave him a goofy smile. "Cute, cute, cute."

Eddie held his breath, watching him. Richie's smile faltered under his gaze. Their knees bumped together as Eddie moved as close as he could. Richie could have gotten up. He could have pulled his legs onto the bed and crossed on the other side. Hell, Eddie didn't have his brake on. Richie could have pushed him aside and run out the door.

He didn't. He just sat there, watching Eddie. Thick heady breath rushed over bruised lips.

"Richie..." Eddie took his hands in his. Richie trembled. For once, he didn't say a word.

Eddie kissed him.

Richie froze. His jaw went slack. He just let Eddie kiss him, let him press into his mouth, feel the heat of his lips. Eddie pushed in closer, desperate for whatever he could get. The wheelchair began to roll back, like Eddie was pushing off with his lips.

That Richie woke up. He grabbed Eddie's hoodie and pulled him close, nearly lifting him from the chair. Eddie didn't care. His fingers curled in Richie's hair. It was softer than he'd ever imagined. He pushed closer, never close enough, tongue in Richie's mouth, faces mashed.

"Ow!" Richie squeaked, pulling back.

"Shit-" *broken nose, moron.* "Sorry."

"I'm fine," Richie winced, blinking out tears. "Don't apologize. Eddie-"

Eddie pushed himself onto the bed. He pulled Richie into a tight hug and kissed him again. He tasted amazing, salty and warm. Richie's fingers ghosted down his sides, finally landing on his hips. Huge, rough hands slipped under his shirt and held him with the softest care.

"Eddie..." Richie said again, half sigh half moan. Eddie moved down to kiss his neck, inhaling hard. "What're you doing to me?"

Eddie felt like he was being fairly obvious. "I love you."

"Don't-" Richie said in a strained voice. It took a minute to figure out what he meant.

Eddie curled his fingers in his hair, pulling just hard enough to make Richie look at him. "I love you, Richie Tozier. I'm in love with you. I have been in love with you since 1989. I will be in love with you until the heat death of the universe. The fuck do I have to do to convince you?"

Richie starred at him. Tears, not from pain, welled up in those sweet brown eyes. "This is a pretty good start."

"Idiot," Eddie said fondly.

Richie pulled him close again.He reached up, touching his cheek with trembling fingers. Like he didn't believe he was there. "Eddie."

"You don't have to-"

"Yeah, I do. I love you. I always loved you. I wanted to tell you so many times."

"You could've," Eddie said but hadn't he? Hadn't Eddie known? He couldn't remember Richie saying so but he'd known anyway, the second he woke up in the hospital, shouting Richie's name.

Richie shook his head. He pressed his lips to Eddie's temple and inhaled. "Couldn't risk it. I was so scared I'd lose you. Then I lost you anyway."

Something wet slipped ontp his skin. Richie was crying. "I'm sorry, Eddie. If I'd said something-"

"Beep beep," Eddie whispered. "You saved my life."

In every way that matters.

He shook his head again. "If I'd said something-"

Eddie put his hands on his face. God, how did he go so long without touching him like this? "Hey, I didn't say anything either."

Richie blinked again. "That's true. Guess we both wasted some time."

Eddie smiled. Richie smiled back. Eddie put his hand, splay fingered on Richie's chest. He could feel his heartbeat, loud and strong. Eddie pushed him back down onto the bed. They lay together, Eddie on top of Richie.

We're so old. He traced around the edge of his bicep, hidden so well under his jacket. The little digital alarm clock on his nightstand showed it was barely 8:30, yet Eddie could have fallen asleep right there. Why not? When had he ever felt safer than when Richie held him?

He didn't mind being old, not if he could be with Richie.

They lay like that for hours, talking and kissing. Eddie couldn't have recounted the conversation if anyone asked. Richie kissed were minor opiates, wiping out anything that wasn't his lips, his breath or his hands. Those hands pressed into his chest, played in his hair, locked fingers in his. Richie could never seem to stop touching him. Not that Eddie ever minded. Now it was deliberate, methodical. No more fake wrestling or arguing about hammocks. Now they just got to touch each other.

"I love you." Eddie said, again and again. He couldn't get over it. Saying those words without prompting. Meaning those words over and over.

"I love you too." Richie answered every time. He smiled every time he said it. His eyes crinkled up and filled with tears. He still smiled, bright and beautiful. Eddie fell asleep watching him smile, whispering "I love you "

When he woke, he said it again.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Ok I trolled you a little with the chapter title. Hope I made up for it later.
>
> I am shocked and appalled that more fics don't involve Tom Rogan being punched in the face.
>
> Please comment! They seriously help me so much!

7. Richie and Eddie Get The Fuck Out of Maine

Richie woke up slow, from a deep and dreamless sleep. Eddie lay on top of him. His nose pressed into the crook of his neck, his fingers in his hair. Richie turned his face into Eddie's hair and inhaled. He smelled amazing.

This is a dream. Richie was in no hurry to wake up. He pressed a small kiss into Eddie's hair, relished the softness on his skin.

His pocket buzzed. Richie fumbled into his jeans, trying not to jostle Eddie too much. Seven missed calls and a dozen texts. Richie ignored them and opened his camera.

Bev had clued him into the pictures. She took a few every time she saw a loser. When the deadlights nightmares got too rough, she had them at her fingertips. Definitive proof that no one had been fatally stabbed or carved up by a space demon.

Richie did not point out that Pennywise had manipulated photos multiple times. Instead he just took a selfie of them, alone in the hotel room with Bev just starting to laugh.

He took another now. Eddie lay safe and whole in his arms. Some time in the night, Eddie had removed his hoodie, revealing a well worn t-shirt and arms to make Richie weep.

Richie turned the phone off and placed it on the nightstand. Whatever else happened could wait until Eddie woke up.

Eddie did wake up, by degrees. He blinked up at Richie, then buried his face in his neck. He wiggled around, trying to get comfortable.

Oh no, baby, what are you doing to me? Richie took a deep, not at all calming breath. *Come on, Trashmouth, you're forty years old! Baseball. Taxes. Pennywise the dancing clown.*

But no trauma or athletic activity could withstand Eddie Kaspbrak.

His mouth pressed wet against his skin. "Richie," his name came out in a hot, hoarse, huff.

"Eds," Richie said, amazed that his voice didn't crack.

Eddie squirmed somehow closer. "Good morning."

"Yeah," Richie said. "A little too good. I gotta get up."

He rolled Eddie onto his back, careful of his scars, and kissed him softly. Eddie made a happy noise and gripped his lapels, pressing his tongue into his mouth.

"Eddie." With every ounce of self control he posessed, Richie pulled away. "Doc said no strenuous activity, babe."

Eddie plopped back onto his pillow and blinked. Then he winced, suddenly remembering his injuries. Richie smiled apologetically and retreated into the bathroom.

He tried to dodge the mirror and failed. *Jesus Christ I'm old!* The nose wasn't helping, covered in gauze and tape. He could feel the dried blood in his nostrils, the dull ache of pain killers wearing off. The bags under his eyes looked like a prize on Price Is Right. He hadn't shaved in days. The hair on his chin had started to curl.

Eddie had kissed him. Eddie had kissed him a lot. Eddie said he loved him, even though Richie was an old fag with an awkward boner to deal with.

Eddie Kaspbrak fucking loves me. Eddie Kaspbrak pushed him onto the bed and kissed him. Eddie Kaspbrak fell asleep in his arms and kissed him when he woke up.

Richie let his jeans drop and took his dick in his hand. He could feel the imprint of Eddie's lips on his own. It wasn't much to imagine them lower. After all, wasn't that one of his first fantasies? Eddie Kaspbrak and his lips, coming in hot after making out with Batman on a grappling hook and Swayze crawling around in Dirty Dancing. Eddie Kaspbrak saying his name.

"Richie?"

Richie nearly pulled his dick off. "Jesus- Eddie?"

"I just-" He faltered, taking in the scene. His hair was a mess, spiked at odd angles. A soft, frankly dangerous blush rose to his cheeks. Richie's face burned. "Are you hard right now?"

"No!" *You are holding your erect penis in plain sight, idiot.* "I- yes, okay?! I am a healthy adult man and I have biological- you fell asleep on top of me and you moved around and you kissed me-"

"I did that?" His voice went high and incredulous. By some hell curse, Richie's blush deepened.

Deflectdeflectdeflect. "Yeah, you just remind me so much of your mom I couldn't help it."

Eddie rolled his eyes but otherwise ignored the joke. His eyes darted between Richie's face and Richie's dick, like he was trying to figure out how one attached to the other. His face was crimson now as he bit his lower lip.

"Are you gonna... take care of it?"

Richie's brain popped. That had been is plan yes. A quick, furtive jerk off to his best friend/secret crush. Why not? We're playing all your favorite hits of the 80s! "I- maybe?"

Eddie raised an eyebrow. "Maybe?"

"Well, I'm not gonna do it with you standing there!"

Eddie nodded. He closed the door behind him and sat down on the toilet. "Please?"

Please, he says. "You wanna watch me jerk off?"

"I want to fucking touch you," Eddie corrected. He looked away, embarrassed. "But that's not-"

"No strenuous activity." Richie agreed. Three little words were the only things keeping him from picking Eddie up and taking him against the sink.

He nodded again, bright red. "Also I don't know how."

"Eds."

"You don't have to... if it's weird..."

"Dude, everything about us is weird. This is... kinda hot."

Eddie raised an eyebrow. "Hot?"

Richie glanced down at himself. He was, somehow, even harder, full Donald Ducking it, with Eddie in the room. With Eddie's big brown eyes staring at him, saying "please" in that warm, breathy voice, with bed head and bare arms, of course Richie got harder than a trig problem in Algebra class. He should have fucking known.

Eddie followed his gaze and paled slightly. "Jesus Christ, I thought you were joking!"

"What?"

"Fucking 'Ten Inch Tozier'!" Eddie gestured at his cock. "You're huge! The hell am I supposed to do with that thing?!"

Richie snorted. He was seven inches max but apparently love was blind. Otherwise how did he get so lucky? "Right now?" He rubbed his thumb over his cock head, already leaking precum. "Enjoy the show?"

Eddie went red again. Richie grabbed some lotion off the sink and slicked up his hands. With the hands of a master, he curled his fingers around himself and tugged gently. He never took his eyes off Eddie. He bit down hard on his bottom lip. Richie sped up, working his wrist back and forth. Eddie made a small, almost pained sound at the back of his throat. Richie reached out with his free hand. He half expected him to bitch about the lotion in his hair but Eddie just leaned in and breathed his name. A vile and irresponsible part of Richie's brain wanted to pull him closer, to guide Eddie down to his aching cock, feel those lips slip around him, and discover what other kind of sounds he'd make.

No. Strenuous. Activity. Dickhead.

So he talked. "You got no idea what you do to me, Eds. You're the sexiest motherfucker I ever saw. You know how bad I wanted to jump your bones all this time? You're fucking beautiful."

"Richie," Eddie leaned in closer.

"Yeah?"

"Keep talking."

Richie tightened his grip around soft brown hair and worked his shaft even harder. "You still got those red shorts you used to wear? I almost flunked seventh grade because of those things. I already had a crush and then puberty hit you like a fucking truck. I thought about you every single fucking night."

Even when we moved, he thought, brushing his fingers over Eddie's cheek, *every boy I ever loved looked just like you.*

"Then you came back. Do you know how hard it to make a grey polo look that fucking good?!"

Eddie glanced down at Richie's cock. "That hard?"

Richie laughed. He laughed and came in one stroke. It landed on Eddie's shoulder and he laughed too. Richie knelt down and kissed him.

"I love you," Eddie said.

"I love you too."

Bev insisted on buying Richie new glasses. Richie argued but she ignored him, dragging them all over lensecrafters before settling on almost exact replicates of his old frames. Eddie didn't mind. He had the cane today, meaning he felt less than 100 years old. Also he could walk around with his hand in Richie's back pocket.

The Losers were equal parts delighted and unsurprised by Richie and Eddie hooking up. Ben had grinned and hugged them while Bev made

a sound that only dogs could hear. Mike managed to congratulate them warmly just before going through a tunnel and losing the call. Bill, harried and breaking up over a shoddy skype connection, asked if they had anything new to tell him. He texted them later, an apology and congratulations.

Richie groused good naturedly. "Spent forty damn years pretending to be straight. You guys couldn't spend five minutes pretending to be convinced."

"Sometimes closets have glass doors." Ben said. He sipped his water while Richie stuck out his tongue.

Eddie didn't give a shit what kind of closet they'd been in. He was just happy to be out. Out in the sunlight with his friends, with Richie's arm around him, Eddie was happier than he'd ever been.

Bev pulled her phone from her pocket, and checked the time. "Baby, we should head to the aiport." She leaned onto Ben's shoulder.

"Second flight's a charm." Ben kissed her forehead. They stepped in through the hospital doors.

On the elevator, Richie turned his face into Eddie's hair. Eddie could feel him smile.

"Call us when you get to Chicago, okay?" Eddie said. He squeezed Richie's ass. The smile in his hair turned to a grin.

"Of course," Bev smiled too. "And you'll let us know when you get to Connecticut?"

"It's a six and a half hour drive," Richie said. "You'll hear from us in New Hampshire."

Richie was borderline obsessive about planning their roadtrip. He planned stops about every two hours. He pretended they were about interesting landmarks or tourist traps. Eddie knew it was am excuse to get him out of the car and make sure his wounds could withstand the stress of the road. Anyone else and he might have been annoyed, but it was Richie.

They stepped out of the elevator, already making plans for a rendezvous when they all had to testify against Tom Rogan. Richie laughed at his own joke, then stopped short, gripping his shoulder so tight it hurt.

"What-" then he saw them too. Three bright red balloons floated in front of Eddie's room. His side flaired awake with sudden panic, as if the claw was ripping him open again. He would have collapsed without Richie's arm around him.

No. It's over. It's dead! Richie told me It was dead!

Ben moved first. He stepped between Bev and the balloons, pulling a ball point out of his pocket. Wielding the pen like a knife, he stabbed the point into the red mylar again and again and again.

Nothing.

Three loud pops and then nothing. No laughter. No blood. No grinning, grease paint monster appeared behind them. Eddie's breath returned to him in a slow stuttering gasp. Richie held him tight.

"Just balloons," Ben said. He swallowed hard and put his arm around Bev. He gestured to small poster on the door. It read "Have A Safe Trip!"

"That's nice," Eddie said weakly.

Still holding on to Bev, Ben ripped the remnants off the wall and tossed them into the trash. Only then did Richie relax slightly. He turned his face into Eddie's hair and shuddered. "So," he said, turning back to face thr group, "who wants to get the fuck out of Maine?"

Bev raised her hand.

It took the four of them roughly an hour to clear the hospital. Check out alone took 35 minutes, since they weren't due to leave for another four hours. Eddie didn't care. They had the referral to the Connecticut rehab, a house that would be ready in the evening and a lifetime of batshit trauma to work through. He just wanted to get started.

"Okay," Richie slammed the trunk closed. "We're good. You guys good?"

"Car's around the corner." Ben pulled him into a tight hug. "Drive safe, okay?"

"Obviously," Richie muttered, still shaken fron the balloons. He patted Ben's shoulder. "Love you, man."

Bev kissed Eddie and Richie on the cheek. "Call us when you get there." She gave Richie a significant look. "Any time."

"Beverly," Richie said, in a passable Clark Gable, "People will say we're in love."

She rolled her eyes and whispered something Eddie couldn't hear. He went and hugged Ben, promising to be in touch soon. The private car Ben hired arrived and they all hugged again. Bev rolled down the window and waved as they turned the far corner.

"Well," Richie turned to Eddie. He had his arm over his shoulder.

"Yeah," Eddie leaned against his chest. Richie smelled like Irish Spring. As much as he wanted to get out of Maine, he hated the idea of sitting alone in a bucket seat with Richie all the way on the other side of the car. "I love you."

Richie kissed him. "Let's get the fuck out of Maine."

They got the fuck out of Maine. The second they hit the highway, Richie slid his hand into Eddie's. Eddie squeezed. They didn't let go until bladders and stomachs demanded a smoothie shop with a restroom.

He watched Eddie navigate the urinal with a cautious eye. He didn't want to hover but he also didn't trust the hard tile floor or Eddie's cane. Much better to just keep his arm around him until Eddie was back in fighting trim.

Or forever. At least until they were out of Maine.

Eddie finished up and got a smoothie for the road. He didn't even complain about it, just confirmed that people did incredible things with spinach, blueberries, and honey. "Want some?"

He offered Richie a straw.

"Dude, I came on your shoulder this morning. We can't share a straw?"

Eddie went crimson. Richie leaned forward and took his sip.

"Ass." Eddie said. He reclaimed the beverage. "It's good, right?"

"Long as you're happy," Richie said. It was actually good but not three months straight good.

Two and a half. He reminded himself. Hours out of Bangor and his chest still felt tight. He should be elated, thanking every lucky star in the sky that they were safe and together. Still he jumped at every sudden sound and gave a wide berth to strangers. *Calm down, Trashmouth.* Richie reminded himself. *That thing is dead. We killed It. Sometimes a balloon is just a balloon.*

Knowing that didn't slow his heart down, or stop him scanned the horizon for any threat, possible or not, as Eddie stretched in the parking lot. Maybe that was the price of survival. They didn't forget this time. Mike and Bill were proof of that. Now they got to remember all the impossible, batshit things that happened to them, and actually deal with the trauma It caused.

"I am," Eddie said.

Richie blinked, anxiety temporarily distracted. "What?"

"I am," Eddie repeated. "Happy. I'm happy."

"Fuck," Richie mumbled and pulled Eddie close. The smoothie bumped against his chest but didn't spill. He crowded Eddie against the car, shielding him from the rest of the world. He'd been ready to run the minute they saw those balloons. He would have, if Ben hadn't reacted when he did. The minute he saw that red mylar floating, he saw it all again. The claw, the blood in Eddie mouth splattered on his

glasses, the last moments when his tongue failed him and Eddie died never knowing.

"Richie?" He cupped his cheek.

"Sorry," Richie leaned into the touch. "I'm in my head. I just... can't believe this."

Because out of everything he saw, Eddie alive and touching him, loving him, was the most unbelievable of all.

"It's okay." Eddie put his head on his chest. "Do you wanna talk about it?"

"Absolutely not." Never in a million years would he expose Eddie to the shaking mass of fear and insecurity in his brain.

"Okay." Eddie patted his shoulder. "Then let's get going huh."

Richie held the door for him and sprinted around to the driver's seat. Eddie turned up the radio, right in the middle of Madness singing "Our House."

He took Richie's hand as the engine roared to life.

"Something tells you that you've got to get away from it!"

He didn't let go.

Notes for the Chapter:

The angst never ends but fluff follows after.

Thank you so much for reading. Please please review!

8. Richie Tozier Gets Better

Richie took him to bed.

Not in the really fun way. They still had a couple months before Eddie was completely healed and the string of medications he had to take basically precluded boners.

Sharing a bed with Richie Tozier while physically incapacitated was easily the most frustrating experience of his life. He saw Richie hard, shirtless, adjusting himself through Pawnee Sanitation Dept. Boxers, and knew intellectually, spiritually, that it was the hottest thing he'd ever seen. Then he looked down at his flaccid self and counted the days down again.

"Stupid fucking body," he muttered on more than one occasion.

"Hey!" Richie countered every time. "I like your stupid fucking body."

Then he gestured to his crotch, making Eddie snort.

The beach house was perfect. Everything was accessible, from the ramps at each door to the hand bars in the shower. The enormous kitchen went unused, except for the blender, coffee machine and counter where Richie kept his take out. They had a tree lined patio, perfect for watching the sunrise. It would be if either of them woke up for sunrise.

They mostly used the bed. Richie passed out almost upon arrival. He slept for the next twelve hours. Eddie dozed next to him, waking up to lips in on his neck and mumbled nonsense in his ear. Richie slept like he'd just figured out how. He snoozed while Eddie read, nodded off half way through a movie. Eddie watched him, gently brushing shaggy brown hair from his eyes. He snuggled easily into Richie's arms, finally able to rest.

He woke up with Richie on top of him. They had breakfast together. Richie drove him to therapy. Eddie talked to Nisha Bishera while Richie scribbled in his notebook. They napped on the patio after lunch. They drove along the coast, talking for hours about nothing. They ate dinner and fell asleep together.

One morning, a little over a week since their arrival, Eddie woke up before the sunrise. Richie's fingers curled in his hair. His breath was warm and wet on Eddie's neck.

"Fuck the 405," he mumbled. "Take Coldwater... save twenty minutes."

"Richie." Eddie didn't want to wake him. He just liked saying his name.

Richie snuggled closer. "No more beans."

"No more beans?"

"Outta beans." He confirmed sleepily. "Tell Steve."

Eddie wasn't sure what beans signified or why his former agent needed to be informed of their absence. He was certain that he needed to get up and visit the bathroom before giving it any attention.

With a small kiss, he slipped out of Richie's hold and into the bathroom. His injuries whined at the sudden movement. With a sigh, he washed his hands and headed for the kitchen. He ought to grab his cane but why risk waking Richie? He braced himself against the wall and made it in record time. A crisp pour of the britta pitcher, a pop of his pill caddy, and he was done for the next five hours.

He finished his glass and stood for a moment. He always liked the morning. Waking before everyone else meant a chance for quiet, a calm that he could never enjoy at home. This was home now. In a few months, LA could be home too. Not always quiet, not with Richie's beautiful chaos, but calm... and happy.

Eddie set his glass down and searched the drawers for a coffee filter. He was allowed exactly one cup of coffee per day. He wanted to

share it with Richie.

The coffee had just begun to drip when Richie screamed.

"Richie!" Eddie moved without thinking. He fell hard on the tile and swore.

"Eddie! Don't- don't!"

Eddie scrambled to his feet, bracing against the counter. His knees throbbed in protest but he pushed on. A heavy thump greeted him in the bedroom. Richie was on the floor, wrestling with their sheets, half screaming, half sobbing his name.

"Richie!" Eddie dropped to his knees, wincing. He caught one flailing arm and pulled the sheet away. Richie stared, bleary eyed, still half dreaming. "Richie, wake up!"

"Eddie!" Richie sobbed. He landed in Eddie's arms with enough force to knock him back on the floor. Eddie let out a sharp, pained, gasp.

"Rich-"

"Eddie," he shook like a child. They lay tangled together. Helpless, Eddie just held on, arms over his shoulders, fingers in his hair. Richie could only weep against him. "Eds! Eds!"

"I'm here," Eddie soothed. "I'm right here. It's okay."

Richie shook his head against Eddie's chest.

"It's okay," Eddie said again, unsure of what else he could say. "I'm right here, Richie. You're okay. Come on, let's sit up."

Richie sat up, face still hidden in Eddie's chest. He wasn't sobbing anymore but he still shook with terror and grief. Eddie pushed his hair out of his face. No obvious injuries from the fall. Richie stared at him with wide, bloodshot eyes. Eddie brushed the tears, still pouring down his cheeks. "Dude, what the hell?"

He shook his head, bed head flopping with the effort. He pulled Eddie close, breathing heavy.

"Bad dream?" *Understatement of the century, Kaspbrak.* Richie nodded. "You wanna talk about it about it?"

"No!" His voice went sharp and pained.

"Richie."

"I don't want to talk about it." He wiped his eyes.

"Okay," Eddie whispered. He brushed his thumb over Richie's cheek, wishing he could do more. "Do you wanna try going back to sleep?"

He shook his head again. Eddie thought back on how exhausted he'd been since leaving Bangor. How long had he been having nightmares?

"Okay. Help me up?"

"Oh fuck, did I hurt you?" Richie looked like he might cry again.

"No, of course not." Eddie said, ignoring the ache in his sides and knees. "I fell."

Richie frowned guilty and helped him to his feet. He allowed Eddie to lead him into the livingroom, arm around his waist. They sat together entwined. Richie pulled Eddie on to his lap, pushing his face into his chest. He sighed slow and shuddering. His fingers curled around Eddie's shirt, up in his hair. Eddie just rubbed small circles into his back, unable to help him.

"There's uh... coffee in the kitchen." Richie held him closer. "Richie, what-"

"Please," Richie said in a soft, pained voice that made Eddie's entire body ache. "Please, Eds, don't make me talk about it."

"Okay," Eddie whispered. "Okay, Richie. You don't have to talk. Just- I'll put something on. Take your mind off it?"

Richie nodded. He stayed pressed into Eddie's chest as Eddie logged into Netflix. He found a documentary about bees and hit play. They just needed something without too much screaming or horror or

clowns.

After about ten minutes, Richie allowed himself to be moved onto the side. Within fifteen, they were spooning, covered in fleece blankets, Eddie's arms around Richie's chest. They didn't speak, but Richie held his hands, occasionally raising their fingers to his lips. As the first episode wrapped up, he stood and collected the coffee from the kitchen.

Eddie wanted to ask. He could guess of course. Knife wielding bullies, demon fortune cookies or terror space clowns? With their well of trauma, it'd be weirder if they didn't have nightmares.

But Richie already said he didn't want to talk about it twice.

And he didn't pressure Eddie to explain the "cruel and inhumane treatment" that ended his marriage.

And his hands were still shaking, even as he sipped his coffee and smirked at the television.

Later. Eddie told himself. *When we're brave enough.*

For now, he just held Richie close.

Waiting rooms had not grown on Richie since Eddie left the hospital. Sitting still was never his forte to begin with. He knew accompanying Eddie into every therapy session was way too codependent. Smothering, some might say, especially since he spent the better part of the morning clinging to his side.

It was the first Deadlight nightmare Richie had since leaving Maine. He hadn't had any since Eddie started sharing his bed. A naive part of Richie hoped they were over. He hoped the would faded the farther they got from Derry. Since Richie planned never to return to Derry, he also never planned to tell Eddie about his nightmares.

Now that plan was shot to hell.

The dream was bad. A 9 on the Scare-o-meter. They were under

Neibolt, in that awful grey water where Bev nearly drowned. He and Eddie held hands under the water. Sonia Kaspbrak- or rather Pennywise in her form- breached behind them. She grasped Eddie in her claws and sunk razor fangs into his neck and pulled him under. Richie dove after them but his limbs felt like lead. He swam down, screaming through the dark water. Then suddenly he screamed through blood. He could see Eddie and his mother- or was it his wife- far out of reach. She was eating him, like something out of national geographic. Richie fought through Eddie's blood while the clown giggled in his head. *Too late, Richie! Much much too late!*

He woke up on the floor. Eddie looked breathless and terrified. He limped heavily and needed help to get up. Richie kept imagining an angry doctor marching out to yell at him. *You broke every bone in his body with your stupid trauma! Now he's a brain in a jar!*

Eddie could be a brain in a jar and Richie would just start working on an exoskeleton he could apologize to. Because he would love Eddie in any and every form and any extra amount of Richie bullshit was more than Eddie should have to deal with.

Except Eddie had only begun to plumb the infinite depths of Richie bullshit. Depths which could apparently produce a leopard seal version of his mother.

Tired of his own head, Richie turned to his phone. He'd never been so grateful for his ghost accounts than the week after Tom Rogan punched him. He'd ignored a dozen emails and calls from Steve, attempting to capitalize on his notoriety. Once Richie started trending, Steve was perfectly willing to be his agent again. Richie spent about fifteen seconds on vanity searches (and two minutes on Ben punching Rogan memes), just to learn exactly what he should apologize to Bev about.

Bev insisted that none of the media attention was his fault and made him promise to focus on himself and Eddie.

He should tell her about the dream. She probably wouldn't say "I told you so". She'd been dreaming of The Deadlights at least once a month for year. Out of everyone, she would understand the best.

Richie did not tell her. Instead he scrolled through his ghost twitter, which he had created years ago solely to creep on tiny brunette thirst traps. Now, sharing a bed with the ultimate thirst trap, he mostly used it to look up Star Wars Memes. Episode VIII was due next year and Richie needed distraction only Oscar Issac could provide.

"Hey," Eddie called in a hoarse voice. Richie looked up immediately. He had his walker today, moving carefully across the lobby.

"Hey!" Richie stood. He pocketed his phone and joined him. "How'd it go?"

"It went." Eddie croaked. "Leg day is the worst day. Let's go home."

Richie nodded, guilty conscience bubbling up. Has Eddie's therapist seen the bruises on his knees? *Yeah, my boyfriend had a bad dream and I fell trying to wake him up. He's usually pretty pathetic but now it's become a nuisance.*

Of course, Eddie'd never say that. He had infinite patience for crazy, much worse than Richie's particular brand. Eddie still loved his batshit mother. That didn't mean he should have to put up with this shit from Richie.

"Can we get something on the way?" Eddie asked as Richie helped him into the car. "I drank all my water and my throat's dead."

" 'course." Richie said. He closed the door behind Eddie and jogged around to the other side. "Where to?"

Eddie shrugged. "Where ever."

"Gotcha." Richie turned up the radio. The 80s spotify carried them easily out of the parking lot. Humming along with Madonna, Richie glanced at Eddie. He stared out the window, leaning against the glass.

He's just tired, Richie told his paranoia. *He's always tired after P.T.*

He pulled into the starbucks drive through and turned down the volume. "Do you know what you want, babe?"

"Banana mango," Eddie said with a tired smile.

Richie got a double espresso which he chugged. He'd make some excuse to sneak out later and get some energy drinks. A Pennywise double feature was not on the books tonight.

They accelerated onto the highway. Eddie looked down at the ice orange mush in his cup as Tears for Fears started to lament their *Mad World.* "I miss solid food," he said, taking another sip.

"Five weeks," Richie said. He tried not to think about the possibility of his wounds ripping open, Eddie becoming collateral damage in Richie's night terrors. He failed.

Eddie grunted. He took another drink from the nearly emptied cup. "Richie?"

"Yeah?"

"About this morning-"

Fuck a damn duck. "I really don't want to talk about it, Eds."

He stared ahead at the road but he could feel Eddie's eyes on him. "Okay," he said. "We don't have to talk about this morning."

"Thank you."

"When did the nightmares start?"

A dozen lies sprung to his lips. Lying might have been his mother tongue.

That was the first one.

I was four and it had nothing to do with evil clowns or you, Captain Arrogant!

I didn't have a nightmare! You had a nightmare about me having a nightmare! Checkmate!

"Night before we went to Bangor." He pushed up his glasses. "It's

really not a big deal."

"Seemed like a big deal."

"Only 'cause of the screaming!" Richie said. "Look, we fought a demon clown and I looked into it's glowing death vagina. It'd be weirder if I didn't have nightmares."

Eddie nodded. "It make sense. I just- you could have told me."

Richie chuckled, humorlessly. "I figured you had enough to deal with."

The frown deepened. "Richie, you know you're not something I have to 'deal' with, right?"

"I know." *That you think that.*

"I'm serious." He reached over and took Richie's hand. "You're not a burden, or fragile or whatever you're thinking. I love you, and I've been on the other side of this. It sucks. Don't do that to yourself."

"Right." Eddie squeezed his hand, like a punctuation mark.

"Seriously." Eddie huffed. "You have to tell me this shit."

He chuckled again. "Don't know if you noticed, Eds, but telling you shit isn't my strong suit."

"Well get fucking better, Trashmouth." Eddie smiled softly. He kept holding Richie's hand. "I get it if you can't talk to me about everything but you should talk to somebody."

"I talk to Bev." Richie said.

"You talked to her today?"

"I will talk to her today. She's probably busy."

"Richie."

"I'll call her tomorrow."

"Also, maybe a therapist?"

Richie winced. "Eddie."

"Could help."

"What the hell am I gonna say to a therapist? 'Yes, Doctor, I'm still having nightmares about the evil space clown that almost killed all my friends, even though we totally bullied It to death a few weeks ago. An extended stay in a padded room? Sounds charming!"

Eddie rolled his eyes. "Just a suggestion."

But Richie was on a roll. "We'd finger paint because Billy Bibbit shanked himself with a crayon."

"So don't talk about the clown! Our official cover story is that I got bisected when a house fell on top of us!" Richie winced. "That sounds pretty traumatizing! Should be good for a couple of ambien at least."

Now Richie rolled his eyes "Breaking News: Kaspbrak Recommends Pills! Details at 11!"

Eddie dropped his hand.

"I'm sorry."

"You're a fucking asshole."

"I know. I'm sorry."

Eddie bit hard on his lip and closed his eyes. "I shouldn't have pushed you."

I told you I didn't want to talk about it. Richie managed to hold his idiot tongue. "You wanted to help." *Don't waste your time. This is as helped as I get.*

Eddie didn't say anything. No one said anything until they pulled up to the beach house. Eddie opened his door immediately and took one step before remembering he needed his walker. Richie hurried to bring it from the back seat. Mobility aids really limited the possibility

of storming away. Eddie very clearly wanted to storm. It made Richie ache. Five weeks until sex and solid food but will he be able to storm again?

"Eds-"

"I'm tired." Eddie said. "I'm gonna take a nap."

He closed the bedroom door before Richie could follow.

"Fuuuuccck." Richie pushed his fingers through his hair. "Fuckfuckfuck."

He pulled his phone out as he strode into the livingroom. Bev's phone rang three times.

"Hi, you've reached Beverly Marsh. I'm unable to speak right now but feel free to text, email, or leave a message here and I'll return your call as soon as possible. Thank you."

"It's Richie." He swallowed. "I fucked up. Call me."

He hung up. He sat down on the couch and cleaned his glasses. *What the fuck is wrong with me?* But that road had way too many forks in it.

His phone vibrated in his hand. "Hey, Bev."

"What's wrong? What happened?!"

He told her everything. About the dream, about making Eddie fall, about the suggested therapy and Richie snapping and ruining everything. "I don't know what to do."

Bev let out a long sigh. "Goddamn, Richie, don't ever leave me a message like that again! I thought somebody died!"

"Sorry," he should just start apologizing after every sentence. "So what do I do?"

"Give him some space?" He could hear her wince. "He shouldn't've pushed you and you shouldn't've given him shit for it. Talk about it when you've both calmed down."

"That makes sense."

"It's good that he knows anyway. Even with the traumatic reveal."

Richie huffed. "He was better off not knowing."

"Yeah, 'cause that's what Eddie's in to. People he loves hiding stuff to protect him."

Touche. They talked for a few more minutes. Bev's divorce was going about as gross as expected. Ben remained handsome and successful. They'd recieved the same pictures from Mike in the everglades. Bill had finished filming and offered them all premier tickets in December. Richie wondered if they'd be in LA by then. He ignored the nagging fear that Eddie wouldn't want to go with him.

"I gotta go meet Ben." Bev said eventually. "Are you good?"

"Yeah, thanks for talking me down."

"Literally any time." Bev said. "Give Eddie my love."

"Give Ben mine." Richie said. "Love you, Bev."

"Love you too, Trashmouth."

Richie flopped back on the couch and sighed.

Eddie woke just after five. The house was silent. No TV, no washer running, no snoring. No Richie on top of him.

"Fuck," Eddie whispered. He sat up and reached for his cane. "Richie?"

No answer.

"Calm down, Eds." He focused on standing and not crashing. *He's got his air pods in. He went to get dinner or he's on the phone. There's a million not catastrophic explanations.*

Still, the tension drained when he found him on the patio. "Richie?"

"Hey!" Richie smiled, unsure of himself. He took his air pods out. "How're you feeling?"

"Better." Eddie was suddenly aware of his bedhead. He tried to smooth it back, belatedly realizing he had no way to ensure it stayed down. "What are you doing?"

Richie had his notebook and a towel in a grocery tote. "Thought I'd check out the beach."

"Oh." Eddie thought he could just make out the sound of waves in the distance. A seagull cried.

Then Richie said, "You wanna come? We can drive."

Eddie nodded. They didn't talk much as Eddie grabbed his shoes and a sweater. He debated whether he'd need the walker. The nap had done it's job and it wasn't as if either his walker or chair would work better on the sand than his cane.

The drive took roughly three minutes. They didn't bother with spotify, sticking with some modern song about angst.

"I didn't know I was lonely 'till I saw your face."

Eddie turned of the chorus of "I wanna get better"s. Some shit was too on the nose.

"Bev sends her love," Richie said.

"Oh." Eddie cleared his throat. "Sorry, I got mad."

"It's cool." Richie pulled into a parking spot right at the edge of the sand. "I shouldn't have said that shit about the pills. That wasn't fair."

"I just-" Eddie took a deep breath. "I felt like you were handling me. Like you thought I wasn't strong enough."

"Eddie,"

"I know it's not true," he said quickly, "that's just how I felt."

"I mean," Richie brushed his hand through his hair. "You weren't exactly wrong. I didn't want you to know about the deadlight nightmares because I don't want you to see me like that. Not because I don't think you're strong enough! Because... I'm weak."

"You're not weak."

Richie shook his head and rolled his eyes. "Eddie, you fucking saw me today. You call that strong?"

"You had a moment." Eddie took his hand.

"I had like three and a half hours but nice call back." Richie lifted his hand and kissed it. "I should have told you before. I'm sorry."

Eddie pulled himself forward, using Richie as an anchor, and kissed him. God, it had been hours. Richie still hadn't shaved. Stubble poked pleasantly into his hand. He grinned as they broke apart. Richie grinned back.

"Bright side, that was my last secret!"

"That's exactly what you'd say if you had a third."

Richie kissed him again. With another grin, he hopped out and crossed to Eddie's side. Eddie slipped out next to him, leaning comfortable on his arm. "I had at least three secrets."

"You had two."

"I know you're busting my ass right now but if one more person says they always knew I was gay, I will throw them into the ocean."

"Fine."

"Thank you." Richie turned his face into Eddie's hair. Eddie listened to him breathe.

He stared out at the ocean, bathed in twilight. The sun set behind them, allowing bright, brilliant stars to appear over the waves. Salt air played over his hair and lips. He looked up at Richie.

"You know this is the first time I've ever been to the beach?"

"Bullshit!" Eddie nodded. "We grew up in Maine! You live in New York!"

"Lived." He corrected. "Mom thought I'd get swept out by a rip tide, and Myra hated sand."

"We're sure she's not Darth Vader?"

"From Star Wars?"

Richie dropped his head on Eddie shoulder and wheezed. "Oh my god, you haven't seen the prequels! Can I please show you the prequels? You can dump me after, it's fine."

Eddie laughed. "Yeah, okay."

"Yeah?" Richie grinned blinding him. "Okay, shoes off! We're going to the beach."

"Richie-" he ought to have complained about bacteria or pollution or his shakey, touch and go Grandma steps. He should have kept Stan's shower cap on and not spent half the night combing nonexistent spiders out of his hair too. Instead he slipped off his loafers and tossed them into the car.

Eddie's cane was almost useless in the sand. He leaned heavily onto Richie, not trusting the grains shifting under his toes. It wasn't bad. Nothing could be that bad with Richie's arm around his waist and Richie's voice in his ear.

"I could probably carry you," Richie said, "unless that counts as handling?"

"I'd let it slide," Eddie said, like the idea of Richie Tozier carrying him off never occured to him three times a day in seventh grade. "Just don't drop me."

"Never!" Richie promised, sweeping him up. Eddie wrapped his arms around his neck. Richie's scent of cigarette smoke mixed pleasantly with the ocean. He could hear his heart pound.

Richie dropped him at the edge of the water. More accurately, he dropped to his knees, let Eddie's feet down into the sand, and made sure he was stable before falling back on his own ass. "Holy shit!" He huffed. "I'm so out shape. Holy shit, why am I so out of shape?"

Eddie laughed. Richie lay back in the sand and stared up at him. He had sand on his glasses. He gripped his belly with both hands. "Eddie, am I fat?"

"You're gorgeous." Eddie dropped to his knees and straddled his chest. He kissed Richie hard, curling his fingers in his hair. He tasted like salt. Richie's fingers slid over his back, coming to rest on Eddie's ass with a possessive squeeze. They made out for a long time, until Eddie let himself crash on to Richie's chest with a sigh.

"You didn't say I wasn't fat." Richie said.

"Wonder why."

"Rude," Richie kissed him again. "I love you, Eddie."

"I love you too."

They fell asleep like that, until the freezing tide licked at their toes. Then they went home, Richie acting as Eddie's crutch. They slept sound.

Notes for the Chapter:

> Sorry for the delay. I wrote 200+ words about Richie watching Queer Eye before remembering this is set in 2016 (how did we process anything without Karamo Brown?). I also wrote 50 words about the sun setting over the Atlantic ocean before remembering basic astronomy.
>
> I'm doing well.

Please review. It means so much to me.

9. Eddie Kaspbrak Moves Out

Richie was going to cause trouble. He was forty years old. He recognized the buzzing in his bones. At some point in the next twelve hours, Richie Tozier would cause trouble. He didn't know where or when but it would be a disaster.

He was overdue for trouble.The last few weeks had passed without any major incident. Richie had two more nightmares but Eddie was right there to wake him up. He also interrupted several wet dreams before learning to delineate between moans but Richie didn't complain. He told Eddie about the nightmares and dreams, and Eddie, wonder of wonders, didn't flinch. He just listened, reminding Richie they were okay.

He did a little more than that. Noticing that the nightmares usually came in the wee hours, he started waking Richie earlier and earlier.

"I must love you," Richie had muttered into his coffee, the first time they watched an ocean sunrise, "because if anyone else got me up this early, I would kill them."

"You'd try." Eddie said, leaning against him.

Eddie leaned against him a lot. The wheelchair gathered dust in the car. He used the walker after therapy, and only half the time. He took his cane mostly out of paranoia, favoring it later in the day. Richie didn't bother masking his pride when he saw Eddie stand on his own.

They had problems of course, beyond nightmares and uncertain mobility. Eddie still had to screen most of his calls, answering only for Nisha Bishera and the other losers. His doctors all had unlisted numbers and he didn't want to risk accidentally talking to Myra.

"We can get a new phone," Richie said, researching how to leave an abusive relationship while Eddie listened to another angry message.

"Maybe," Eddie said. He made another entry on his laptop, the ongoing record of Myra Bullshit that Nisha Bishera requested. She was allowed to contact Eddie to exchange relevant information but the calls were all manipulation and cruel words. Each call was another nail in the "no alimony" coffin but they made Eddie grow quiet and small. Richie hated it.

The Divorce hearing loomed. Richie drove Eddie into the city and spent two hours scoping out day time open mics. He hadn't gone up yet. He pretended that he was waiting for his Tom Rogan punching bag spotlight to go out. He wasn't. The world had moved on from Richie Tozier. He was just nervous about working material he actually cared about.

Still, listening to nineteen year old kids fumble over their clean sets beat sitting in Nisha Bishera's lobby. Eddie kept Richie as far from the divorce as possible. Probably for the best. If he knew exactly what Myra did that made Eddie come home so drained, Richie's body count would double. Derry's ineffective police force wouldn't be there to not press charges.

Despite everything, or maybe because of it, they were happy. Eddie nagged him about using coasters. Richie fell asleep in his lap. It was nice.

Richie didn't trust it. He especially didn't trust it today, collecting the last of Eddie's stuff. He bounced back and forth on his heels, looking at the museum of repression that Eddie once called home. The livingroom alone was a tight mix of hilarity and horror. Kastle Kaspbrak 2.0 was nicer than the original. Why not? Eddie made good money. Besides his obscene insurance rates (worth every penny), and a penchant for Gucci, he had no grand tastes. He probably had a maid come in every afternoon. Richie pitied the domestic that had to dust this army of hummel figurines under the paranoid eye of Myra Kaspbrak.

She was out today, under the explicit demands of Nisha Bishera. The voicemails had finally paid off and they had permission to get Eddie's personal effects out of the house without supervision.

"There's cameras everywhere," Eddie said on the drive over.

Doubtless, he also sensed impending trouble from Richie.

"So no nasty on your former marital bed?"

"No rubbing your ass or dick on the counters. No mooning anything. No upper decking."

"I'm joking," Richie said, "but I'm impressed you know what an upper decker is."

"You told me about it." Eddie said.

Eddie was up in the master bedroom, digging through old papers. That left Richie without supervision. He should have been touched by Eddie's trust. He also should have been watched.

He stopped at a faded picture on the mantle. Eddie, five years younger and sallow faced, stood next to Myra. She wore a horrifying white dress and a smile that didn't reach her eyes. Eddie looked like he'd just thrown up, or was about to.

Richie snapped a surreptitious picture, just as a key turned in the lock. Richie dropped his phone.

"Eds!" He called up the stairs. "Company!"

"What?"

"Sugar," a familiar, feminine voice fake swore and Richie was suddenly twelve again. Sonia Kaspbrak was back early, Richie had two weeks to go on the great Eddie Ban of '85, and he was not supposed to be there. Myra Kaspbrak- *what the hell is her maiden name? Does she have one or did she just appear, fully formed after Mrs. K passed? There must always be a Stark in Winterfell-* opened the door.

Myra stopped with a sharp inhale. Wide blue eyes quickly narrowed as she recognized him. "Oh."

"Jump out the window! Our bike's out back! She'll never catch us!"

We're forty now, Richie reminded his lizard brain. *Also the windows have bars.*

Instead, he gave an awkward wave and backed toward the staircase. "Eddie!"

Eddie came down with a large filing box. "Oh."

Myra sniffed and stiffened. "Eddie."

"Myra. What are you doing here?"

Myra jutted out her chin. "I thought you'd be finished by now."

"Bullshit." Richie cleared his throat. Eddie shot him a look. Richie shrugged. The judge gave them until five. It was barely three.

Eddie pushed the box into his hands. "Rich, can you take this to the car? Please."

"Okay." He took the box and turned quickly. Anything to end this interaction. Myra glared after him.

Eddie watched the man he loved squeeze passed his wife. Surreal didn't begin to describe it. Richie turned, pushing the door open with his butt. Five hours ago, Eddie had been touching that perfect ass. Now he was back in the townhouse, alone with Myra for the first time in months. His side ached.

"Well," Eddie turned back to the stairs.

"Wait, Eddie!" She rushed forward, nearly taking his hand. She thought better of it, folding her hands together. "Please."

Eddie inhaled for a four count, then out for three, as his therapist recommended. "Yes?"

She took a step back. "Can we talk?"

The idea made his stomach drop. "No, we can't. That's why we have lawyers and judges, because us talking doesn't work."

Myra sighed. "I'm sorry. I was angry. I should have listened to you

more. I want to fix this."

Eddie's head throbbed. "There's nothing to fix, Myra. I-"

"Hey!" Richie poked his head in the door. "You got any more boxes or should I just-"

"Yeah, upstairs." Eddie jerked his head back. "Second door on the right. They're labeled."

"Cool." Richie squeezed his shoulder as he passed. Eddie let out the breath he'd been holding.

Myra sat down hard on the sofa, with her head in her hands. Her shoulders quaked with silent tears. On instinct, he went to her. Myra shrugged away from his touch. "You brought him here? To our house?"

"Richie's been helping me." Eddie said. Familiar guilt swirled in his stomach.

She snorted and wiped her eyes. "I know how he's helping you, Eddie. I hope you're enjoying yourself."

The guilt vanished. Eddie stepped back, glaring. "Don't."

"This is a midlife crisis, Eddie." Myra continued. "You survived a trauma and now you want to try everything different, regardless of the consequence. Dr. Derringer agrees."

"Dr. Derringer is a fucking quack!" Eddie snapped. Myra flinched at the profanity as Richie came down the stairs, carrying three more boxes.

Boyfriend glanced between wife and husband. "You good?" He asked Eddie.

"I'm fine," Eddie said. Richie nodded and made for the door.

"He's going to leave you." Myra said.

Richie stepped back through the door. "The fuck did you say?"

Myra glared at him. She was still crying but her face had gone red. She sniffed, as though Richie was something she'd stepped on, and turned to Eddie. "He's going to leave you. You think he'll stick around when he sees how bad you get? All your allergies and neuroses? The impotence-"

Richie dropped the boxes with a thud. "You need to shut the fuck up."

She got up, squaring her shoulders. "You need to get the heck out of my house and my husband."

"Bitch-"

"Richie, stop." Eddie stepped between them. Richie raised his palms and backed up. "This has nothing to do with you."

Myra's smile faded as he turned to her. "Myra, I have been trying to leave you for four years. We never once made each other happy."

"Eddie-"

"I was impaled and you didn't come!" He snapped. "Years going on and on about how fragile I was, making me second guess every independent instinct, and the one time I actually got hurt, you didn't even show up!" The words came faster than thought. "And I felt fucking relieved! I had holes in my organs and I knew you would try to make it worse! Everyone said I was paranoid but you always wanted me sick! You'd hobble me and call it medicine, you demonic bitch!"

She hit him. A single, open hand slap sent him staggering. Eddie winced at the sudden stinging pain. One hand groped for the mantle while the other pressed to his swelling cheek. He could feel the scar from Bowers' knife throb.

"Eddie!" Strong hand steadied him. He blinked at Richie's worried face, trying to hide the tears.

"How can you say that to me?!" Myra wailed behind him. "After everything?! After I took care of you when no one else would? I loved you when no one else would! You ungrateful little bastard!"

Richie caught her wrist before the slap connected. He pushed her back, eyes like fire. He leaned in, inches from her face. "Touch him again, and I will gut you."

All the sound left the room. For the first time, Eddie understood how Henry Bowers died. How Richie, who laughed at his own jokes and fell asleep in front of nature documentaries, had killed a man. He was angrier than Eddie'd ever seen him but he was calm too. He didn't shout or snarl, just spoke unquestionable fact. The soft, laughing Richie Tozier who kissed Eddie's hair and worried about developing a dad bod disappeared under this quiet rage. This was the same boy who picked a bat from a pile of garbage and said *"I'm gonna have to kill this fucking clown,"* before he slammed into a cosmic horror, except now he was a man.

Eddie pushed himself off of the mantle, catching a glimpse of his wedding picture as he fought to maintain balance. "Richie."

He dropped her wrist and stepped back. Eddie gripped his shoulder, half to calm him and half to keep from falling over.

"Let's go."

Richie nodded and picked up the boxes. He kicked the door open with his foot and held it open. Eddie paused, taking one more look at the townhouse. Myra stood where Richie'd left her. She clutched her wrist while big wet tears fell pathetically. "Eddie." She sniffed. "Please-"

Eddie closed his eyes. "I want you to understand something. I'm in love with Richie but he's not why I'm leaving. I would leave even if I had nothing out there. Our marriage was toxic for both of us. I'm sorry I didn't leave sooner, that everything dragged out like this. I hope you get help."

"You can't-" Myra sniffed. "You need me, Eddie. I take care of you."

Eddie shook his head and closed the door behind him.

He didn't know how he got to the car. One moment he stood on the landing, the next he sat in the passenger's seat, fumbling with his

medication. His hand wouldn't close tight enough to open them. The pills clacked together as he shook.

"Jesus." Richie climbed into the driver's seat. He took the bottle and opened it. "Eddie, breathe, okay? Just take a breath."

Eddie inhaled and exhaled again. Richie handed him and open water bottle. Eddie threw the pain pills in his mouth and drained the bottle. "Fuck."

"I'm calling the cops," Richie said. "Bitch violated a court order, not to mention fucking assault-"

"Richie." Eddie said. His voice cracked.

Richie faltered. His finger hovered over the keypad. He put the phone down on the dash and reached for Eddie. "Fuck you're shaking."

"Sorry." He couldn't stop.

"Don't." Richie kissed his fingers. "I should've kept my mouth shut."

"I love you." Eddie whispered. "Jesus Christ, I can't believe that just happened."

They sat for a moment. Eddie felt the adrenaline fade. He'd actually done it. He'd looked Myra in the eye and told her he was leaving. He'd left.

Eddie started to laugh. His ribs ached with the force of it. "Holy shit, Richie!"

"Oookay." Richie said. "Is this good manic laughter or bad manic laughter? Who do I call?"

Eddie forced himself to focus. "Call Nisha. Myra violated the court order. I can get the footage of her hitting me from the cloud."

"Yeah, are you okay?" Richie said. He frowned at Eddie. "She got you right on the scar."

Eddie leaned across the parking brake. He put both hands on either

side of Richie's face and kissed him. When they pulled apart, Richie was blushing and breathless. Eddie grinned at him. "Trashmouth, I am the best that's ever been."

They went to bed. After unloading the car, calling the lawyer, and hacking the cloud for evidence, Richie was exhausted. He flopped down on the bed, tossing his glasses on the night stand. Eddie crawled in after him. They fell asleep kissing.

Richie woke up a couple hours later with Eddie snuggled into his chest. Soft lips pressed into his neck. His t-shirt rode up, revealing the far edge of his perfect ass.

Gorgeous. Richie traced his fingers over pale skin. Eddie's breath hitched as he shifted his weight.

It wasn't fair. Tantalus got a better deal. There was Eddie Kaspbrak, squirming on top of him, with only two thin layers of cotton between them. Eddie Kaspbrak, brave and beautiful, who he'd been dreaming about since puberty, wanted Richie in the same way.

And they couldn't do anything about it for two more weeks.

With a small kiss to his forehead, Richie rolled Eddie off to the side.

"Nnnfff," Eddie complained, clinging to his arm.

Too fucking cute. Richie slipped out of bed, and slunk off for a very cold shower.

He kicked his boxers into the corner and turned on the water. Stepping under the stream, Richie remembered lips on his chest. Eddie's heat as their skin pressed together. Best, or worst, of all, his fingers curled in Richie's hair, pulling just hard enough to hurt. Worst, or best, of all, his other hand snaked around Richie's waist. Fingers slid under his boxers and down into the cleft of his ass.

Richie took himself in hand. *Two weeks.* He imagined the fingers inching further, teasing him. Eddie would go slow, meticulous and

careful. As if he could ever mess it up with Richie. As if they hadn't waited long enough to feel each other like that. Richie huffed, imagining Eddie's fingers inside him. Eddie's cock waiting for him. He pressed his forehead to the tile wall, trying to bite back a moan.

"Richie," that same soft touch slid across his hip. He let Eddie turn him around in the stream. He stood naked, hair still messy from sleep. Richie's cock twitched in his hand.

"Eds."

Eddie crowded him back against the wall. He kissed his neck. Richie trembled. Eddie reach passed him and turned up the heat. He bit into Richie's lip. He pulled Richie down the meet him, tongue pushing into his mouth.

Holy fuck. Eddie splayed his hand on Richie's chest and let it fall down with the water. His head dropped, wet brown hair plastered on his chest. Eddie took Richie's hand, circled around his aching cock. He took it away, guiding it to rest on his ass, and took Richie's dick in his hand.

"Eddie." Richie couldn't say anything else. He couldn't think of anything else. The water could have boiled him alive and he'd blame the heat on Eddie.

Eddie glanced up at him, brow furrowed. "Gimme a minute," he muttered. "It's different- maybe-"

Then he adjusted slightly, so one hip met with Richie's, and his hand shifted to a new angle. Then his hand moved again, up and down his shaft, jacking him off.

Richie's words came back. "Holy shit. Fuck! Eddie!"

Eddie slowed, eyeing Richie nervously. "I don't know what that means. Is it- is this good?"

Richie didn't know if he should laugh or whine. "Baby, this is amazing." He nuzzled into Eddie's hair, "but the doc said no strenuous-"

"I'm moving my wrist! That's hardly strenuous activity!" Eddie snapped. Richie had to stifle a groan.

"Oh my god, Eds, don't scold me while your holding my dick! You're gonna give me a fetish."

Eddie blushed. "You want me to stop?"

"Don't stop, Eds." Richie kissed him. "Don't ever stop."

Eddie nodded. He turned his attention back to Richie's dick. He went forward with nervous and clumsy enthusiasm. Richie guided him. Arhythmic strokes gradually found the right pace. Eddie bit his lip and groaned. He'd started blushing the second he took Richie's dick. Now he'd gone bright, beautiful red. Richie knew he was babbling. Pleas, profanity, and prayer slipped over his lips without reason or restraint, all around the central theme of Eddie.

"Eddie!" Richie came hard. His entire body convulsed, smacking his head against wall. It barely registered. He folded down, pushing his face into Eddie's neck. He smelled of Richie'a shampoo. They smelled like each other. "EddieEddieEddie..."

"Rich-" Eddie whined. He shook in the water, still warm and welcoming. "Richie, I'm hard."

He was. Eddie Kaspbrak's full fledged, all american boner lay before Richie. He thought he should salute.

Someone's attached to that, horndog. The decent part of his brain chastised."You okay?"

"Yeah," Eddie said. He stared at his dick, like he expected it to disappear. "I guess the side effects wore off?"

Miracle of miracles. "Eddie?"

"What?"

"I really wanna put your dick in my mouth."

Eddie laughed, the best sound in the world, earning a 100 on the

Richie Tozier Joy-O-Meter. "Is that a yes?"

Eddie's eyes went wide. He looked frightened and excited, staring up at Richie with those gorgeous brown eyes. "Please, Rich-"

He didn't even finish the sentence before Richie had dropped to his knees and taken him inside.

Eddie thought he might pass out. Richie Tozier's lips were on his dick. Richie had his dick in his mouth. His tongue swirled over the head, like he couldn't get enough of the taste. Eddie reached down, steadying himself on Richie's hair.

Eddie had recieved exactly one blow job in his life. He'd never asked Myra, knowing her disgust with sex in general. One drunken finals night in college, a boy with thick black glasses went down on him. They never spoke again but Eddie thought about it too often. It had been a quick and shame filled expexperience.

Richie had no shame at all. One hand gripped Eddie's ass for stability. The other played with his balls, fondling and teasing as he sucked him off.

"Fuck! Richie!" He grabbed Richie's head with both hands, trying to keep his balance. Everything blurred around the edges. He came too quickly, spurting in the back of Richie's throat.

"Fuck." Eddie said again.

Richie leaned back on his heels. He looked up at Eddie with a smug grin. He licked his lips, the bastard.

"Jesus Fuck," Eddie huffed.

"It's Richie, actually." He stood up and turned off the water. His kiss tasted like salt.

"Oh my god, that's disgusting!" Eddie kissed him. "Why are you so fucking gross?"

"Bitch, please," Richie didn't pull away so much as talk with his lips on Eddie. "Your spunk probably has antioxidants or vitamins or some shit."

"Vitamin D." Eddie whispered. He felt Richie's grin on his. "We should probably take an actual shower."

"Don't think that'll take," Richie said but he reached for the soap and wash cloth anyway. Washing each other took way too long. He kept getting distracted by Richie's body, his long legs, his hair and arms. His hands, huge and rough, touching Eddie everywhere.

"God damn, Eddie," he massaged his fingers into his hair. "You know how fucking hot are you? Fucking scalding."

"Richie," he sighed, letting the water fall over him. Richie kissed him again. They stayed like that until the water went cold. Then Richie lifted him up, naked and soaked, and carried Eddie back to bed.

Notes for the Chapter:

> So satisfying to change the rating from Mature to Explicit.
>
> Please leave a comment. They mean the world.